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The US spy scandal and the return of German imperialism

By Peter Schwarz

12 July 2014

The expulsion of the CIA station chief this week is directly linked to the revival of German imperialism, which has been systematically propagated and driven forward by the German government since the beginning of the year.

The German media and political parties have responded to the government's demand that the Berlin head of the CIA immediately leave the country with satisfaction. It marked a "turning point in the history of German-American relations, and an unprecedented act of protest against American arrogance," wrote the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The most widely sold German daily newspaper considered the drastic measure as a step towards more German independence and drew a parallel with the German refusal to participate in the Iraq war in 2003: "Gerhard Schröder's opposition to the Iraq war twelve years ago was the first step in asserting independence from the major ally. Now the next step is coming."

The Germans, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, have "a right to be treated fairly and as an equal in the partnership with the US ... Obama and his people [will] hopefully realise that they cannot get away with everything in Germany."

Several regional newspapers spoke in similar tones. “We will not accept being dealt with like that: that message should now have reached Washington,” declared the *Nordwest Zeitung*. And the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung* wrote, “The continuing humiliation of Germany by out of control American intelligence agencies cannot be dismissed any longer.”

All parties in parliament, especially the Left Party, also welcomed the government action.

The expulsion of the American intelligence chief was “only a first step,” noted André Hahn, who sits on the parliamentary control committee for the intelligence services for the Left Party. German Chancellor Angela Merkel had to “explain in a government statement after the summer break at the latest, how the government plans to protect citizens from surveillance from foreign and domestic intelligence agencies.”

This is clearly absurd. The expulsion of the Berlin head of the CIA has nothing to do with protecting citizens from surveillance. And the German government would be the last to protect them from this threat. The German and American intelligence agencies collaborate closely in foreign and domestic surveillance, spying on the global telecommunications network and even in the selection of targets for killer drones. This was shown by the documents released by the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

This collaboration is continuing after the expulsion of the US intelligence chief. This has been emphasized by government spokespersons on both sides of the Atlantic at every opportunity. This is why the German government has also strictly opposed offering Snowden asylum or providing him with immunity to allow him to testify in Germany.

The real reason for the conflict with Washington is Berlin’s attempt to return to the world stage as a major imperialist power. Already in January, foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier declared in parliament that Germany was too big and important to limit itself to “commenting on global politics from the sidelines.”

Shortly thereafter, German President Joachim Gauck spoke out in favor of stronger military engagement by Germany at the Munich Security Conference.

The return to its great power ambitions is bringing Germany into conflict with the US, which is not prepared voluntarily to give up its position as the sole global power. For the present, this is expressed in the desire “to be treated fairly and as an equal partner” by the US. But it will not remain confined to this.

The fight for spheres of influence, raw materials, new markets and cheap labour, which is the source of the growth of militarism, not only leads to a more aggressive approach towards China and Russia, but also produces conflicts between the imperialist allies. Both can result in a third world war.

There are already significant tensions between Germany and the US. They collaborated to install a right-wing, pro-Western regime in power in Ukraine, but they have differences on the issue of

economic sanctions against Russia, which would mainly affect German and European companies.

In the Middle East, Germany and the European Union are increasingly distancing themselves from US policy, which has resulted in a debacle. Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, traditionally a close ally of the US, published a guest article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Wednesday, describing the military invasion of Iraq in 2003 as the “original sin” of the catastrophic development in the regions, with the “too rapid and too early withdrawal” of American troops as the “second error”.

The current outrage from leading German politicians about US spies is largely for show. The SPD politician Karsten Voigt, who was German government coordinator for German-American Co-operation from 1999 to 2010, stated in an interview in *Die Zeit* that the unmasking of a US agent in the country’s foreign intelligence service (BND) came as no surprise.

When asked: “Did it come as a surprise that the US has spies in our government and the BND,” Voigt replied: “I did not know that of course, but I always assumed it was the case. During my tenure in the nineties, German ambassadors in Washington were convinced that they would be monitored.”

The German government is deliberately using its shows of outrage to exploit widespread hostility against the US’ criminal foreign policy to advance its own imperialist interests and expand the German secret service and armed forces. Such a policy change means that German imperialism is once again returning to a tradition that put the crimes of all the other imperialist powers in the shade. The German government not only has the support of the governing parties, the conservative CDU / CSU and social democrat SPD, but also the opposition parties, the Greens and the Left Party.

Whoever wants to fight against surveillance and war, must reject this fraud. The spying upon of millions of people by the NSA, CIA and other US services will not be stopped by the upgrading of German intelligence services, but only by the dissolution of all of the secret services, including those in Germany itself.

Along with the struggle against war and social inequality, the fight against state espionage and monitoring requires the international unification of the working class on the basis of a socialist program pledged to the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a socialist society.