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War, rearmament and “Green values” in Germany

When the Green Party’s Annalena Baerbock took over as German foreign minister in December, she promised a “values-led” foreign policy. It was to be “feminist,” “conform with human rights” and “climate-oriented.” Now we know the half-life of “Green values”—it is less than two months.

In early February, Baerbock appeared in combat gear for a photo op on the Donbass front, where Ukrainian soldiers and pro-Russian separatists were confronting each other. Her martial appearance strengthened President Vladimir Putin’s conviction that he could not expect any security guarantees for Russia from NATO, which ultimately led him to decide to attack Ukraine militarily.

No sooner had the war begun than the German government, with the full support of the Greens, announced the biggest rearmament programme since the Second World War. The military budget is being increased by €100 billion to €150 billion this year. Even the ban on arms exports to war zones, which the Greens had solemnly invoked in their election programme last year, was summarily lifted by the federal government. Now, Germany is flooding Ukraine with deadly weapons, prolonging the war and making it bloodier.



Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in Kiev (Photo: kmu.gov.ua/CC BY-SA 4.0)

Then, on March 18, Baerbock delivered a lengthy speech outlining the main features of a new National Security Strategy being prepared by the coalition government of the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP), under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry she leads.

Entwined with phrases about “freedom,” “longing for security” and the “future of our children,” she developed an Orwellian scenario that would make even Cold Warriors from the 1960s pale. It blurs the line between external and internal security and, in addition to the Bundeswehr (armed forces), which are being upgraded to Europe’s strongest army, also places science, environmental policy and the economy in the service of security.

Security policy is “more than military plus diplomacy,” Baerbock emphasised. “If investments in infrastructure, if trade policy are part of our security, then that also means decisions on security are not only made in the Foreign Ministry or in the Ministry of Defence, but also in companies, in municipalities and in universities.”

Baerbock made a clear commitment to NATO and pleaded for the strengthening of its “European pillar,” for its “presence in the countries of South-Eastern Europe” and for a “credible nuclear deterrent.” To ensure the latter, the German government had decided to procure the F-35 fighter aircraft. She also spoke out in favour of expanding the “European defence industry,” whereby Germany is already the fourth largest arms exporter in the world.

Whereas the Greens had previously advocated disarmament and arms control, Baerbock now declares: “We must think of disarmament and arms control as complementary to

deterrence and defence. That means defensive capability in the alliance. This is crucial for our ability to act. For me, defence describes both the ability and the will to defend ourselves. ... I am convinced that our ability to defend ourselves determines our security.”

The Bundeswehr must be able to fight in the immediate vicinity and worldwide, Baerbock declared. In the past, the strategic question had been: “Do we defend our security far from here in the Hindu Kush or other places? Or do we defend our security right on our doorstep?” Experience has shown, she said, “It’s not either or. Far or near.” It was “clear that the missions of our soldiers will no longer automatically be thousands of kilometres away from Flensburg or Freiburg. Nevertheless, these missions also remain important.”

Baerbock advocated abolishing the constitutionally anchored separation of the military and the police. In recent years, she said, “in a digitalised world, the threats from inside and outside have become completely” blurred. “We also have dividing lines in our constitution. So, we must ask ourselves honestly: how do we deal with these old dividing lines in the future?”

In a thinly veiled call for internet censorship, Baerbock placed great emphasis on cyberspace, which she said would “certainly be the biggest challenge.” Cyber and hybrid warfare were “a central part of modern warfare.” The threats showed that “not only do we need strong cyber defence capabilities, but part of our work on the national security strategy will also have to deal with competencies between the Bundeswehr and national security agencies, between the federal and state governments.”

Baerbock also put environmental policy at the service of German and European great power interests: “One thing is clear: get away from fossil fuels and move faster towards renewable and efficient energies. These are not only investments in clean energy, but these are investments in our security and thus in our freedom.”

In addition to Russia, Baerbock named China as the most important adversary, which must be confronted not only in Europe, but also in Africa and the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese “Belt and Road” initiative shows “that investments in infrastructure in particular are relevant to security.” One can only “act independently if one is not completely dependent on others. ... And that is why we will not only develop a new security strategy in the coming months, but also a new China strategy.”

Baerbock also made no secret of the fact that her security strategy serves imperialist aims and has the profit interests of the German economy in mind. Trade policy, infrastructure policy, foreign and security policy, “they all belong together,” she said. “Because vulnerability in the 21st century, can also be when authoritarian states [obviously meaning China] invest billions of euros in European motorways, roads, electricity grids and ports.”

A “values-driven foreign policy” means “defending values and interests—including economic interests—at the same time. Because the one is closely related to the other. ... If we want to hold our own globally in the trial of strength of the 21st century, we must bring all our instruments up to date—militarily, politically, analogue, digitally, technologically. We need to have a comprehensive understanding of security without becoming totally fuzzy.”

Habeck in Qatar

Robert Habeck hastened to put the Greens’ new foreign policy values into practice. Earlier this week, the Green Vice Chancellor and Economics Minister travelled to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates accompanied by 22 business bosses—including the heads of Thyssenkrupp, Bayer and Siemens Energy. Claiming that Germany must become independent of “Putin’s blood-stained gas and oil,” he threw himself on the sand before the autocrats of the Gulf region.

The Emirates’ human rights record is well documented. In the 10 years since the award of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, 15,000 construction workers have died there, according to Amnesty International. That is, as *Tagesspiegel* calculated, “at least 234 lives per World Cup match.”

The 2 million migrant workers from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan who are exploited in Qatar for starvation wages have no rights. They are not allowed to organise or change companies. They work 12-hour days in sweltering heat and often receive no wages for months. Seventy percent of deaths go unaccounted for. Families who lose their main breadwinner often receive no news, let alone compensation.

Journalists working in Qatar must agree not to spread unauthorised information and not to obtain news illegally. When they do research, they are sometimes detained for days.

The situation is no better in the United Arab Emirates. They—along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar—are leading the Yemen war. They bomb the country regularly, deploy ground troops and paid-for mercenaries from Latin America, and commit numerous war crimes. The war is supported by the US and European powers. According to UN figures, it has so far claimed around 300,000 lives, including many civilians and children, and has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe. Eighty percent of the 30 million Yemenis are dependent on humanitarian aid from outside.

But all this did not prevent Habeck from bowing reverently to his hosts and agreeing to work closely with them. After his meeting with the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, he enthused that the day had “gained a strong momentum.” The Emir’s support had been beyond measure. It had been “magnificently” agreed to enter into a long-term energy partnership.

This is not limited to replacing Russian gas supplies with Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG). They also agreed on close cooperation in the research and production of “green” hydrogen, which is to be produced with the help of solar plants and exported to Germany.

The Greens’ “value-driven foreign policy” apparently does not mind bloody hands as long as the owners of those hands serve German economic interests. One should hang the pictures of Baerbock in combat gear and of Habeck’s genuflection in Qatar on the façade of the Green Party headquarters in Berlin. They say more about the party’s policies than a thousand programmes.

The media now hail the Greens’ *realpolitik*. “Is the programmatic core of the Greens about to melt? Is government participation a fast wash cycle for world happiness plans that must be paid for with whiplash?” asks the Germany blog of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, noting with satisfaction: “Those who want to advocate values in politics must first formulate interests.” This “hard lesson” would now have to be “permanently internalised” by the Greens.

Tagesspiegel comments: “The war is forcing a reassessment in many areas and changes priorities. This has a disturbing effect. And yet it also has its good points.” Convictions that had not been questioned for a long time were being subjected to a reality check and what does not prove itself was being sorted out.

Morals and the class struggle

Baerbock justifies the new orientation of the Greens with the fact that the Ukraine war has changed everything: “Probably none of us could have ever imagined this. We are experiencing a brutal war of aggression 10 hours by car from here, in the middle of Europe. Real, close, terrible.”

What nonsense! When the Greens first sat in the German government, they participated in the bombing of Belgrade, which is only an eight-hour drive from Germany and had already been bombed by the Nazis. That was also “real, close, terrible”—except that the Greens were on the side of the attackers in 1999.

Since then, the Greens have supported almost all of NATO’s wars, which have claimed millions of victims. In 2011, they attacked the German government from the right for not participating in the bombing and destruction of Libya.

In 2014, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the Greens, played a major role in the coup that overthrew Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and laid the seeds for today’s war. In the process, they had no qualms about the fascist militias that eventually ousted Yanukovich.

Leon Trotsky, the leading Marxist of his time, wrote a scathing essay on the eve of World War II about petty-bourgeois moralists who support the most reactionary policies in the name of abstract values and timeless moral principles.

“And who are all these democratic moralists?” he asked. “Ideologists of intermediary layers who have fallen, or are in fear of falling between the two fires. The chief traits of the prophets of this type are lack of understanding of great historical movements, a hardened conservative mentality, smug narrowness, and a most primitive political cowardice.”

There is no morality that is above classes, Trotsky stressed. Those who do not want to relapse into religion must realise “that morality is a product of social development; that there is nothing invariable about it; that it serves social interests; that these interests are contradictory; that morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character.”

The morals and values of the Greens reflect the interests of wealthy middle-class layers who have benefited from the intensified exploitation of the working class over the past 30 years. The war is also leading to an intensification of the class struggle. The Greens are responding to this with a sharp turn to the right and a corresponding reshuffling of their moral values.

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