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Germany's foreign minister bangs the drum for war in New York speech

The keynote speech on foreign policy given by German Foreign Minister and Green Party politician Annalena Baerbock at The New School in New York City on August 2 demands a response. There are lies that are so outrageous that they develop a devastating momentum of their own if left unchallenged.

Embedded in phrases about freedom, democracy and human rights and reminiscences of Hannah Arendt, who fled Germany from the Nazis as a Jew and taught at The New School from 1967 to 1975, Baerbock sketched out a vision of a world dominated by the US and Germany. She declared war not only on Russia but also on China and justified this imperialist great power fantasy with breathtaking falsifications, omissions and distortions.



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

In 1989, President George Bush had famously offered Germany a “partnership in leadership,” Baerbock claimed. But at the time, Germany had been too busy with reunification to accept the offer. Today, she said, things had changed fundamentally. “Now the moment has come when we have to create it: a joint partnership in leadership.”

Such a leadership partnership was “not a romantic project to bring back good old transatlantic times,” Baerbock continued. By the good old romantic times, she meant the Cold War, during which the world repeatedly stood on the brink of nuclear annihilation. At that time, the Greens had still protested against nuclear weapons. But in the meantime, Baerbock—like Dr. Strangelove in Stanley Kubrick’s famous film—has learned to love the bomb and is thinking of using it herself.

In a particularly bizarre paragraph of her speech, she describes how children ask at breakfast, “Mum, what are nuclear weapons anyway?” only to assure them, “I like NATO, really.” These children’s grandparents, she says, took to the streets in the mid-80s to demonstrate against rearmament. “Now these grandparents, mothers, fathers and their children sit at the kitchen table and discuss rearmament.”

Baerbock is obviously talking here about herself and about the wealthy clientele of the Greens but not about the vast majority of the population, who do not feel the slightest inclination to be incinerated by nuclear weapons for German great power plans.

Throughout her speech, Baerbock kept coming back to the fact that the desired “leadership partnership” is to be understood primarily in military terms. “In Germany, we have abandoned the long-held German belief in ‘change through trade’,” she says. Change through military force has apparently taken its place.

Russia’s war against Ukraine, she says, had caused the German government “to put some long-held positions on security policy to the test. Germany has set up a special fund of 100 billion euros with which we want to strengthen our Bundeswehr [Armed Forces]. We have revised principles on arms exports that have existed for decades, so that Germany is now one of the strongest military and financial supporters of Ukraine. And we have expanded our contribution to NATO.”

But this was only the beginning, she said: “Our goal is to further strengthen the European pillar of NATO ... and to do so for the long term.” The European Union must become more strategic,” a Union capable of dealing with the United States on an equal footing: in a leadership partnership.” And it must “become a stronger security actor,” linking its defence industries more closely, and “capable of conducting military missions to stabilise regions in its neighbourhood.”

Brazen lies

After its bestial crimes in two world wars, German militarism had to moderate itself for decades. Now, Baerbock strings together one brazen lie after another to justify its revival.

This begins with the claim that February 24—the day of the Russian attack on Ukraine—“changed our world.” President Putin “wants a world in which the law of the strongest applies, not the strength of the law, a world in which great powers can simply annex smaller states at will.

“I am 40 years old, was born in West Germany and fortunately have never experienced war or dictatorship,” Baerbock continued. But now, President Putin was “not attacking the peaceful European order theoretically, the international order—his attack is brutal reality.”

Baerbock may be relatively young (she is actually 41). But the claim that she had “never experienced war or dictatorship” is simply absurd. Since she was 10 years old, the US, with which she now seeks a “leadership partnership,” has been waging war practically non-stop. Not only does Washington make use of the “law of the strongest” and disregards all the rules of international law, it has destroyed entire societies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, killed hundreds of thousands and driven millions to flee. Meanwhile, the US is openly preparing a war against economic rival China.

Baerbock was 18 when the then Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer gave the green light for the Bundeswehr’s participation in the NATO war against Yugoslavia, which was illegal under international law.

And at 33, she was a Bundestag (federal parliament) deputy and a member of the Green Party leadership when it played an active role in the right-wing coup in Kiev that laid the

groundwork for today's war. The elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was overthrown with the help of fascist militias and replaced by a pro-Western puppet.

Even then, the German government had announced it wanted to become a major political and military power again. Immediately before the coup in Kiev, three high-ranking representatives of state and government—Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Party, CDU)—had declared this in almost identical speeches at the Munich Security Conference.

Baerbock's claim that the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr was a reaction to the Russian attack on Ukraine is thus an obvious lie. Rather, the war has provided the welcome pretext to implement long-held rearmament plans, which meet with strong rejection among the population, as quickly as possible.

Since the 2014 coup, NATO has systematically rearmed Ukraine, holding out the prospect of it joining NATO and sabotaging all efforts to find a peaceful solution. President Putin reacted as was to be expected from a right-wing nationalist and lobbyist for the Russian oligarchs and, as NATO had hoped, he struck out militarily.

Since then, NATO has been ruthlessly exploiting this reactionary attack. It is waging a proxy war against Russia on the backs of the Ukrainian population and is doing everything to continue it until the Russian army is defeated, even if this costs a huge number of lives. Its goal is to eliminate Russia as a geopolitical rival, to gain unhindered access to its vast raw materials and to divide up its immense territory. Domestically, the war against Russia and the offensive against China are intended to distract from growing social tensions in both the US and Europe.

Against this background, Baerbock's invocation of the "transatlantic community of values" and "irrevocable transatlantic partnership"—she used the word "transatlantic" no less than 30 times in the course of her speech—can only cause nausea. It is a partnership between predators.

Baerbock explicitly wants to extend the "transatlantic leadership partnership" to the conflict with China. "It cannot be in our interest for China to create excessive economic

dependencies in its region,” she declared, announcing a new “China strategy” from her ministry “that will be published next year and will take full account of strategic considerations here in the United States.”

She rants about the daily struggle for “peace, freedom and security” and the “inviolable dignity of the human person,” while in reality she is preparing a renewed explosion of German militarism.

At the same time, she is decidedly selective when it comes to human dignity and human rights. Violations, real and alleged, are invoked whenever they damage a geopolitical rival, like in the case of the Uighurs in China. They are ignored and played down when they are committed by an ally.

Only three weeks ago, for example, Baerbock welcomed the Egyptian dictator and butcher of Cairo, Abdelfattah al-Sisi, to Germany as an ally in the fight against climate change. Al-Sisi’s police have killed thousands of protesters, tortured tens of thousands of political prisoners in their jails and executed several hundred every year.

The leading party of German militarism

The Greens have become the leading party of German militarism, to which they even sacrifice their core political issue, environmental policy. To be able to continue the war in Ukraine, they now advocate a longer operating life for nuclear and coal-fired power plants, the suspension of the rewilding of agricultural land and the abolition of other environmental protection measures for which they had campaigned for decades.

Der Spiegel journalist Dirk Kurbjuweit recently attested that the Greens had replaced the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) “as the German party of state.” “They are in favour of arms deliveries, although they have pacifist roots, they temporarily rely on coal, although this can harm the climate, they get involved in a debate on nuclear power, although they emerged from the anti-nuclear movement.” They are not doing all this to increase their election chances but “so that Germany and Europe can get through this crisis better. Thus, the Greens, formerly a protest party, have become the German party of state, a title previously claimed by the CDU.”

Cynically, in New York, Baerbock tried to use Hannah Arendt to justify the Greens' transformation from a pacifist to a militarist party. She quoted Arendt's postulate of "thinking without a banister"—thinking that does not follow any school or particular theory and does not bow to any intellectual constraints. She concluded: "In doing so, she described an approach in which we are courageous enough to discard prejudices and preconceived ideas and open ourselves to new ideas."

We do not share the political and theoretical conceptions of Hannah Arendt, whose existential philosophy led to deep historical pessimism and whose theory of total domination blurs the distinction between fascism and Stalinism. But Baerbock's efforts to misuse her to justify German militarism is the height of insolence. Arendt, who narrowly escaped the Holocaust because she managed to escape from an internment camp in France in 1940, was an irreconcilable opponent of German militarism throughout her life. She devoted a large part of her work to dealing with the experiences of the Nazi regime.

Political lessons

The transformation of the Greens into Germany's leading war party contains fundamental political lessons. It confirms that the struggle against war—like the struggle against inequality, climate change and all the other evils of capitalist society—is a class question, not a class-neutral "human" question. Only the mobilisation of the working class to overthrow capitalism can prevent the destruction of human civilisation by a third, nuclear world war.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) and its predecessor, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (League of Socialist Workers), have been combatting the illusion that the Green Party is a left-wing party since it was founded in 1980. Emerging from the 1968 student movement, the Greens' programme "drew liberally from the Frankfurt School, such as the rejection of the class struggle, a concentration on questions of lifestyle, and skepticism towards technological progress," as the SGP's *Historical Foundations* summarised the character of the Greens. "The anti-capitalist rhetoric of the SDS had disappeared and given way to pacifism, environmentalism and the revival of bourgeois democracy.

“At their heart, the Greens were retrogressive and conservative,” the *Historical Foundations* continues. “In their social composition, the Greens were a party of the academically educated middle class ... while Green Party members have the highest average income and level of education of all parties.”

It is the social interests of these affluent layers that are driving the Greens further and further to the right. Over the past three decades, the living standards of the working class have stagnated and declined. At the lower end of the scale, a broad stratum has emerged that has no property and earns little more than the subsistence level or not even that.

At the upper end of the scale, a small number of billionaires and millionaires have amassed fabulous fortunes. Below them, there is a broader stratum of high-earning managers, top civil servants, politicians, journalists and the self-employed. Many have also become rich through inherited wealth.

This 90 to 99 percent on the income and wealth scale form the social base of the Greens. They perceive the growing social tensions and increasing combativeness of the working class as a threat to their privileges and react by entrenching themselves behind the state and militarism.

Of course, this does not apply to every single member of this stratum. There are always individuals who choose otherwise. But the course of history is not determined by individual decisions but by the laws of the class struggle.

The enthusiasm of the German petty bourgeois for war and militarism is not new. In 1908, the German Fleet Association, which campaigned for the expansion of the German navy against Britain, had over a million members. Hitler found an enthusiastic audience for his “Lebensraum” (“living space”) plans among the petty bourgeoisie. Now, the Greens are also swinging fully behind this reactionary tradition.

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