

# Anti-War Views Criminalized in Germany. Diana Johnstone

On the purpose of NATO: “To keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down” — saying attributed to Lord Hastings Ismay, the secretary general of NATO 1952-1957.

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*Divide and rule is the eternal law of Empire.*

*Above all, don’t let other big guys get together. Keep them at each other’s throats. Half a century ago, stuck in the unwinnable Vietnam war, President Richard M. Nixon heeded Henry Kissinger’s advice to open relations with Beijing in order to deepen the split between the Soviet Union and China.*

But which big guys, and when? Priorities have evidently shifted. Eight years ago, America’s most influential, private geostrategic analyst, George Friedman, defined the current dominant U.S. *divide et impera* priority, at work in Ukraine.

“The primordial interest of the United States is the relationship between Germany and Russia, because united, they’re the only force that could threaten us,” Friedman explained.

Russia’s main interest has always been to have a neutral buffer zone in Eastern Europe. But the U.S. purpose is to build a hostile *cordon sanitaire* from the Baltic to the Black Sea, as a definitive barrier separating Russia from Germany.

“Russia knows it. Russia believes the United States intends to break the Russian Federation,” said Friedman, jokingly adding that he thought the intention was not to kill Russia but only to make it suffer.

[Speaking](#) to an elite group in Chicago on April 13, 2015, Friedman noted that the U.S. Army commander in Europe, General Ben Hodges, had just visited Ukraine, decorating Ukrainian soldiers and promising them trainers. He was doing this outside NATO, said Friedman,

because NATO membership required 100 percent approval and Ukraine risked being vetoed, so the U.S. was going ahead on its own.

What the U.S. has long dreaded, said Friedman, is the combination of German capital and technology with Russian resources and labor. The Nord Stream pipeline was leading in that direction, toward mutual trade and security arrangements that would no longer require either the dollar or NATO.

“For Russia,” said Friedman, “the status of Ukraine is an existential threat. And the Russians cannot afford to let it go.” For the United States, however, it is a means to an end: separating Russia from Germany.

Friedman concluded that the big question was, how will the Germans react?

So far, German leaders have been reacting like the loyal managers of a country under U.S. occupation – which it is.

## The German Peace Movement Threat



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during a virtual press conference with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington, D.C., Jan. 5, 2022. (State Department/Ron Przystucha)

Any sign of sympathy with Russia has been so demonized, repressed, even criminalized since the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24, 2022, that most German protests initially avoided taking any position on the war and focused on the economic hardships caused by sanctions.

But on Jan. 25 of this year, **Chancellor Olaf Scholz** gave in to U.S. pressure to send German Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, about the same time that German **Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock**, of the Green Party, casually told an international meeting that “we

are fighting a war against Russia.”

This jolted people into action.

Spontaneous demonstrations broke out in large and small cities all over Germany with slogans such as “Ami (Americans) Go Home!”, “Greens to the Front!”, “Make Peace Without German Weapons.” Speakers condemned the tank deliveries for “crossing a red line,” accused the United States of forcing Germany into war with Russia, and called for Baerbock’s resignation.

The wave of demonstrations peaked one month later on Feb. 25 when up to 50,000 people rallied to the “Uprising for Peace” (*Aufstand für Frieden*) in Berlin, called on the initiative of two women, left politician Sahra Wagenknecht and veteran feminist writer and editor Alice Schwartz.

A demonstration in Berlin on February 25, initiated among others by the left-wing politician Sahra Wagenknecht, took a stand against further arms deliveries to Ukraine. [#Germany #PoliticalWar pic.twitter.com/GYUkU4tueB](#)

— Rossa Primavera International News (@NewsFromDonbass) [February 25, 2023](#)

Over half a million people signed their “Manifesto for Peace” calling on Chancellor Scholz to “stop the escalation of arms deliveries” and work for a ceasefire and negotiations. Organizers called for reconstruction of a massive German peace movement, on the model of the anti-nuclear missile movement of the 1980s that led up to Russian acceptance of German reunification.

However, building a peace movement in Germany today faces many obstacles. Under U.S. military occupation since the end of World War II, German institutions and media are permeated with American influence, as is the legal order. Paradoxically, the trans-Atlantic American grip seems only to have tightened since German reunification.

## **Monitoring ‘Extremes’**

Germany monitors political “extremism” through a domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, BfV (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*). Although strictly speaking Germany does not have a constitution, it has a strong Constitutional Court designed specifically to prevent any reversion to Nazi power practices.

Instead of a constitution, a transitional Basic Law approved by the Western occupying powers (the U.S., Britain and France) in 1949 enabled the Federal Republic to assume the government of West Germany. Upon reunification, the Basic Law was extended to all of Germany.

In the spirit of liberal “antitotalitarianism,” the BfV monitors both “left-wing extremism” and “right-wing extremism” as potential threats. “Islamic extremism” has more recently come under supervision. The underlying political implication is that “right-wing extremism” designates Nazi tendencies, while “left-wing extremism” leans toward Soviet-style communism.

This 20th century political topography implicitly establishes “the center” as an innocent middle-ground where citizens can feel at ease. Even the most radical militarism is not “extreme” in this scheme of things.

Article 5 of the Basic Law grants individuals the right to express opinions, but there are numerous limitations in the Criminal Code, with punishment for “inciting hatred,” racism, anti-Semitism and prison terms for Holocaust denial. Also prohibited are propaganda or symbols of “unconstitutional” organizations, disparagement of the State and its symbols, blasphemy against established religions and especially failure to respect “human dignity.”

Of course, what matters in all these laws is how they are interpreted. The ban on “rewarding and approving crimes” (Section 140), that was originally intended to apply to convictions for violent civil crimes, has now been extended to the geopolitical sphere, namely, outlawing “approval or support” of what it terms “aggressive war.”

Antiwar activist Heinrich Bücker’s speech in Berlin last June 22 calling for good relations with Russia on the anniversary of the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union was condemned by a Berlin court for “approving Russia’s crime of invasion.” In practice, any effort to clarify the Russian position by referring to NATO expansion and Kiev regime attacks on Donbass since 2014 can be interpreted as such “approval or support.”

△ Breaking

A anti-war activist in Germany has been convicted for speaking out about German involvement in the war with Russia.

He said:

"We Germans must never again be involved in a war against Russia"

Anti-war views are being criminalized. <https://t.co/UghDrgJPJl pic.twitter.com/0FErMgN0L5>

— Andre Damon (@Andre\_\_Damon) [January 31, 2023](#)

Needless to say, Germans were never threatened with criminal prosecution for approving the U.S. invasions of Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan, much less the totally aggressive and illegal 1999 bombing of Serbia, in which they enthusiastically took part. Widely celebrated as a laudable act of humanitarianism, that bombing campaign, killing civilians and destroying infrastructure, forced Serbia to allow NATO to occupy its province of Kosovo, where the Americans built themselves a huge military base. Ethnic Albanian rebels declared independence and thousands of non-Albanians were driven out.

## **German Police Enforce Centrist Conformity**

As demonstrators gathered for the “Uprising for Peace” demonstration in Berlin, an organizer appeared on the speakers’ platform to read out a long list of things banned by police. The list included numerous symbols or signs related to the Soviet Union, Russia, Belarus or Donbass; Russian military songs; “endorsement of the war of aggression currently being waged by Russia against Ukraine,” etc.



The day before, Berlin police had delivered to the organizers a detailed explanation justifying these prohibitions, specifying that “public safety was in imminent danger.” Police said that according to their information, “the participants of your meeting will mainly consist of people with an old-left, pro-Russian basic attitude, who are against the arms deliveries of the German government to Ukraine, the geopolitics of the ‘West/the USA’ and against NATO in general.”

The police had reason to believe that the Feb. 25 meeting would attract “very heterogeneous” participants “with their own views (state delegitimizers, conspiracy believers, supporters of the Putin regime, etc.)” and therefore, precautions must be taken.

## The Cross-Front Threat



Weimar-era Communist Party of Germany, or KPD, leader Ernst Thälmann, in center front, with raised clenched fist, and members of the Alliance of Red Front-Fighters or RFB, marching through Berlin, 1927.  
(Bundesarchiv, CC-BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons)

Police referred to a comparable meeting a month earlier, on Jan. 27, whose organizers were accused by leftwing and antifascist groups of having “tolerated cross-thinkers (*Querdenker*) and people of the right scene at their meeting.” A cross-thinker is one who crosses the enemy front lines between left and right, an offense called “cross-front,” also referred to as “red-brown”.

What is remarkable is that in Germany, the establishment, the media, the BfV and notably the police have taken up the term “cross-front” (*Querfront*) with the same opprobrium as the Antifa movement where it is used ostensibly to enforce the ideological purity of the left. Initially it meant a rightwing appropriation of leftwing themes intended to seduce and mislead leftists into fascist combinations. The historical basis of the term lies in unsuccessful coalition attempts of rightwingers in the late Weimar Republic in a context of intense rivalry between strong Nazi and Communist movements vying for working class support, totally unlike the political atmosphere of today.

In the absence of either a strong Nazi or Communist movement, the term is currently used to denounce any cooperation, or even contact, between leftists and movements or individuals described as “extreme right.” This label is frequently based on not much more than opposition to unlimited immigration, denounced as racism.

By this standard, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) opposition party (with 78 out of 736 seats in the current Bundestag) is “extreme right.” Since most Bundestag members critical of arming Ukraine come either from Die Linke (Left) party or the AfD, the anti-crossfront vigilance condemns in advance a broad, open antiwar opposition.

## Subjective Evaluations by Police



German riot police during 2017 protests in Hamburg against the G20 meeting. (t-h-s -, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons)

According to the Feb. 24 Berlin police warning, “The approval of the war of aggression against international law, which the Russian Federation is currently waging against Ukraine, is punishable under Section 140 ...” Such approval can be expressed not only by words but by a number of signs and symbols. In particular, the display of the letter “Z” (supposedly standing for the Russian expression *za pobyedu* – for victory) would constitute a criminal offense.

Even more far-fetched, the flag of the defunct U.S.S.R. is also criminalized, because, according to police: “the U.S.S.R. flag symbolizes a Russia within the borders of the former Soviet Union.” This, according to Berlin police, “is seen by experts as the actual desired goal of Russian President Vladimir Putin” and explains his attack on Ukraine.

“The present restrictions are expressly not directed against the content of expressions of opinion, which may not be prevented within the framework of Article 5 of the Basic Law, but are intended, from a contextual point of view, to prevent your assembly, in the manner in which it is conducted, from being suitable or intended for conveying a readiness to use violence and thereby having an intimidating effect, or from violating

the moral sensibilities of citizens and fundamental social or ethical views in a significant manner.”

## A Cautious Demonstration

The “Uprising for Peace” in the end provided no opportunities for police interventions or arrests. Like the “Manifesto for Peace,” the German speeches largely avoided references to U.S. and NATO provocations leading to the war.

Only Jeffrey Sachs, whose opening speech in English was broadcast to the crowd on a screen, dared speak of the background to the Russian invasion: the 2014 Kiev coup, the U.S. arming of Ukraine, the U.S. opposition to peace negotiations, the likelihood that the U.S. was responsible for blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines and other facts susceptible of offending certain sensibilities. But there was no chance that Berlin police would arrest Sachs, who was not in Germany.

Jeffrey Sachs hold an online speech in today's peace demonstration in Berlin.  
[#b2502](#)

More: <https://t.co/FGbmEbjBP pic.twitter.com/BXxUbff4gX>

— Kevork Almassian ( @KevorkAlmassian) [February 25, 2023](#)

The other speakers largely ignored the origins of the war, concentrating instead on fears of where it might lead: constant escalation of arms deliveries, even nuclear war. The huge crowd was bundled up against the icy cold and light snow. Flags mostly portrayed peace doves and slogans called for diplomacy, for peace negotiations instead of arms deliveries, for avoidance of nuclear war. Neo-Nazis and extreme rightists were declared unwelcome and must have come in disguise as they were scarcely visible. The whole event could hardly have been more well-behaved and respectable.

## Attacking Wagenknecht

Despite all this niceness, the demonstration and its organizers were fiercely attacked by politicians and media. Sahra Wagenknecht is a popular figure, being pushed out of her dwindling Left Party (*Die Linke*) by leaders who tend to follow the increasingly bellicose Greens in the hope of being included in leftwing coalition governments.

Wagenknecht, married to Oskar Lafontaine, who as a leading Social Democrat was prominent in the antimissile movement of the 1980s, is rumored to be preparing to found a party of her own. This would fill a yawning gap in the current German political scene: an antiwar party firmly on the left. She must therefore be seen as the main political threat to the reigning coalition.

Thus Wagenknecht has been vehemently attacked for the fact that her antiwar speeches have been applauded in parliament by members of the AfD. And despite having repeatedly condemned the Russian invasion for breaking international law, other things she has said have been described as “close to the narrative” of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Despite her caution, she is blamed for “understanding” the Russian viewpoint, which is

unacceptable.

In a major hit [piece](#), journalist Markus Decker called Wagenknecht the most influential enemy of democracy in Germany. Wagenknecht, he wrote, “is the personified embodiment of what intelligence officers have been warning about for years: the blurring of the boundaries between the political fringes and the extremes.”

Kundgebung am BRB Tor war Riesenerfolg & größte [#Friedenskundgebung](#) seit Jahren. Versuche, sie kleinzureden oder zu diffamieren, werden nicht funktionieren. Danke an alle, die gekommen sind! Meine Rede auf der Kundgebung: <https://t.co/umAPY5H0Gw> [pic.twitter.com/mnWcb0xqIT](https://pic.twitter.com/mnWcb0xqIT)

— Sahra Wagenknecht (@SWagenknecht) [February 27, 2023](#)

[Translation of Sahra Wagenknecht’s tweet: “Rally at the BRB gate was a huge success & biggest #peace rally in years. Attempts to belittle or defame them will not work. Thanks to everyone who came! My speech at the rally:”]

In other words, she should be monitored by the BfV as a sponsor of the dreaded cross-front. “Wagenknecht, who has been systematically blurring the lines between dictatorship and democracy since the beginning of the Russian attack on Ukraine, is not about peace. It’s about destroying democracy. Wagenknecht is probably its most influential enemy in Germany,” Decker wrote.

In the past few years, as hostility toward Russia has been building in the West, the Antifa exclusionary dogma has strengthened within the left. The result is that the left is less interested in winning over conservatives than in excluding them. This is a sort of essentialist identity politics: anyone “on the right” must be inherently an irreconcilable enemy.

There is no thought that perhaps some people may vote for the Alternative for Germany because they feel let down by other parties, for instance by the Left Party. This could be especially true in East Germany, where both parties have roots.

## **Freedom of Opinion Under Threat**

On March 15, a group of leftist artists and intellectuals released a petition calling for the defense of free expression. It reads:

“Germany is in a deep crisis. ... Disinformation and manipulation of the population largely determine the current media culture. Anyone who does not share the prescribed official opinion on the Ukraine war, criticizes it and makes this known publicly, is defamed, threatened and sanctioned or ostracized. ... In such an atmosphere, open debates, the exchange and presentation of differing views in the media, science, art, culture and other areas are hardly possible anymore. A truly free formation of opinion by weighing different arguments is impossible. Bias and ignorance, but also intimidation, fear, self-censorship and hypocrisy are the consequences. This is incompatible with human dignity and personal freedom.”

Last month, Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (SPD) introduced a new law making it



possible to dismiss “enemies of the constitution” from the civil service by a simple administrative act. “We will not allow our democratic constitutional state to be sabotaged from within by extremists,” Faeser said. But in the view of the German Civil Servants’ Association, the bill “sends a message of mistrust to both employees and citizens.”

A war atmosphere is supposed to unite a nation. But imposed artificially, it exposes and creates deep divisions.

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*Featured image: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Berlin, December 2022. (NATO)*

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