

European leaders use World War I commemoration to press for new wars

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Political and military leaders from Europe and the US used commemorations marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I to press for new wars.

August 4, 1914 marks the day on which the British government declared war on Germany following the latter's invasion of Belgium. On the same day, German parliamentary deputies, including all the representatives of the Social Democratic Party, voted unanimously for war credits to fund Germany's war effort. The ensuing war between European powers claimed a total of nearly 40 million casualties.

Attending the two days of commemorations on Monday and Tuesday in the Belgian city of Liège were representatives from 83 countries, including kings, presidents and military leaders from many of the countries involved in World War I. The US was in attendance with a delegation led by the Secretary of the Army, John M. McHugh.

The region around Liège saw some of the bloodiest fighting in World War I, with an estimated 4 million soldiers losing their lives in years of bitter trench warfare. It was against this background that the French President François Hollande gave his keynote speech on Monday, declaring to the assembled European and international dignitaries that the main lesson to be drawn from the war was that "today neutrality is no longer appropriate."

Referring directly to the conflicts raging in Ukraine and the Middle East, Hollande made clear that French imperialism was preparing to engage in fresh military confrontations. Allegedly departing from his prepared speech, Hollande stated: "How can we stay neutral when a people, not far from Europe, is fighting for its rights and territorial integrity? How to stay neutral when a civilian aircraft can be shot out of the sky? When there are civilian populations being massacred in

Iraq, minorities being persecuted in Syria?"

Hollande then continued: "When in Gaza a murderous conflict has been going on for over a month ... we cannot stay neutral, we have an obligation to act. Europe has to take its responsibility to act, along with the UN."

Hollande concluded from the slaughter of millions in World War I that new military interventions and wars had to be prepared: "We cannot simply invoke a cult of memory, we have to take our responsibilities."

Hollande went on to praise the European Union as a "crazy idea of creating a model of cooperation and progress," while warning of the risk of "national selfishness."

Hollande's invocation of the responsibility of major powers was repeated by German President Joachim Gauck in his own speech in Liège.

"Millions of people today suffer from violence and terror as a result of the instrumentalization of political, ethnic and religious beliefs," Gauck declared. "Therefore, we are united today as representatives of so many countries not only in memory, but also remembering that together we have a responsibility for the world."

Speaking on behalf of the British government, Prince William also raised the events in Ukraine which "testify to the fact that instability continues to stalk our continent." He went on to praise the collaboration between former European adversaries, working together "for three generations to spread and entrench democracy, prosperity and the rule of law across Europe, and to promote our shared values around the world."

The comments by Hollande, Gauck and Prince William testify to the utter bankruptcy of European capitalism. They take the occasion of the

commemoration of the mass slaughter of World War I to press for aggressive policies that threaten to unleash an even greater global military conflagration.

The US and Germany, with the backing of France and Britain, whipped up far right and nationalist militias to overturn the elected government in Ukraine in February and provoke the current escalating military confrontation with Russia.

Just last week, the European Union joined the US in imposing drastic economic sanctions on Russia. Meanwhile, the EU continues to arm Ukraine despite an official resolution, passed earlier this year, banning such weapons exports.

In the Middle East, the US and European powers have backed the most right-wing Islamic forces throughout the Middle East, in order to overturn elected governments. In so doing, they have plunged the entire region into chaos.

Over the past month, the same powers have provided unequivocal backing to the Israeli government in its campaign to terrorise the Palestinian people.

In France, Hollande has banned demonstrations against the war in Gaza, while in Germany Gauck has led the campaign to slander those opposed to the Israeli massacre of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip as “anti-Semites.” On the same day that Hollande and Gauck spoke in Liège, the total number of casualties in the Zionist regime’s war in the Gaza Strip rose to over 1,800.

Now these European leaders, with blood on their hands and increasingly reviled in their own countries, ominously declare that European powers must exert even more “responsibility” for the world. Their remarks make clear that new military catastrophes are being prepared for the working masses in Europe and throughout the world.

This is the significance of Hollande’s appeal in Liège for the rejection of a “cult of memory” with regard to WWI . As they seek to justify the imperialist bloodshed of the 21st century, they view as their most important task the wiping clean of historical memory of the imperialist crimes of the 20th century.



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