

German President Gauck threatens Russia with war

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On September 1, German President Joachim Gauck used a meeting commemorating the outbreak of the Second World War to launch a direct attack on Russia. At the Westerplatte near Gdansk in Poland, he accused the Russian government of conducting an “offensive struggle for new borders and a new order” based on the “law of the jungle,” and of having declared Russia’s partnership with the European Union, NATO and the large industrial nations “de facto null and void.”

We “resist those who breach international law, annex foreign territory, and militarily support divisions in foreign lands,” Gauck proclaimed. “We will adapt our politics, economics and readiness for defense to the new circumstances,” he added.

This can be understood only as an open threat of war against Russia. On the same day, Valeriy Heletey, defence minister of Germany’s ally Ukraine, announced on his Facebook page: “A great war has arrived at our doorstep—the likes of which Europe has not seen since World War Two.” He predicted losses that “will be measured not in the hundreds, but thousands and tens of thousands.”

Gauck could not have chosen a more symbolic location to utter his war threats. The Second World War began on September 1, 1939 with the shelling of Westerplatte by the German battleship Schleswig Holstein. The subsequent conquest and subjugation of Poland, which claimed the lives of a fifth of the Polish population, including almost all of Poland’s Jews, was the prelude to the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, which claimed a further 27 million victims.

Ultimately, it was the selfless struggle of the Soviet Red Army that forced Hitler’s Wehrmacht to retreat and liberated Poland and eastern Germany from the murderous terror of the Nazis.

In his speech, Gauck ignored this historical context and engaged in a degree of historical falsification that is normally encountered only in far-right publications. Five years ago, then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was invited to the commemorative event at the Westerplatte, together with 19 other European government heads. This time, Gauck did not utter a word about the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union and the role of the Red Army. Instead, he characterised the liberation from the Nazis as the replacement of one dictatorship by another. “With Soviet rule, one dictatorship followed the preceding one,” he declared.

This equating of the Nazi dictatorship with the Stalinist regime is a trademark of right-wing anti-communists. In reality, these were two entirely different historical phenomena.

The Nazis embodied in their most naked form the interests of German finance capital, which utilised Hitler to destroy the organised workers’ movement and realise its plans for world domination. The Nazis openly proclaimed their plans for conquest (“Lebensraum in the East”), to depopulate and colonise vast territories in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and carry out genocide against the Jews.

The Stalinist regime was the result of the degeneration of the Soviet Union under conditions of its international isolation and imperialist encirclement in the 1920s. The regime represented the interests of a bureaucracy that suppressed workers’ democracy and made the nationalised property the basis of its privileges.

In contrast to the imperialist powers, the Stalinist regime did not pursue expansionary goals in World War II. The extension of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe after the Second World War was agreed with the Allies at the conferences in Yalta and

Potsdam. For the bureaucracy, it served defensive purposes—the creation of a buffer zone to protect the Soviet Union from new imperialist attacks and to block the development of genuine socialist revolutions by the working class in Eastern Europe.

Gauck's twisted historical narrative completely covers over the fact that many Polish workers supported the expropriation of the capitalists after the Second World War and came into conflict with the Stalinist regime because it did not go far enough. They not only wanted to be rid of the German occupiers, but also the large land owners and capitalists who had ruled the country before the war under the dictatorial regime of Marshal Pilsudski, whom the current rulers in Warsaw herald as a hero.

With his omission of any mention of the Nazi crimes against the Soviet Union and his threats of war against Russia, Gauck directly aligns himself with the war aims of Germany in the First and Second World Wars. In his speech at the Westerplatte, he acknowledged the crimes of the Nazis in Poland and described it as a “miracle” that a reconciliation had occurred between Germans and Poles. But at the same time, he declared that out of the “guilt of yesterday” a “special responsibility for today and tomorrow” was emerging, i.e., to take action against Russia.

In his 1961 book, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, the historian Fritz Fischer demonstrated that Germany had pursued the goal in both world wars of isolating and pushing back Russia in order to strengthen Germany's dominance in “Mitteleuropa” (Central Europe).

Already at the beginning of the First World War, the German government developed the plan of removing Ukraine, Georgia and other countries that were part of Tsarist Russia, and later the Soviet Union, from Moscow's sphere of influence and bringing them into Berlin's sphere. After the October Revolution of 1917 and the dictated peace of Brest Litovsk, Germany implemented this objective with the occupation of Ukraine. From here, a direct line leads to Hitler's Eastern campaign, which also occupied Ukraine and used it as a staging platform to attack Moscow.

With his threats of war against Russia, Gauck is following seamlessly in this tradition. In this way, he has confirmed Fischer's thesis that there was a continuity of German war aims between the First and

Second World Wars, which German imperialism is taking up once more today. After 1914 and 1939, German imperialism in 2014 is again preparing to resolve its insoluble contradictions by expanding eastwards.

Whereas Germany attacked Poland in 1939 to clear the way for an assault on the Soviet Union, today it is working with the right-wing rulers in Warsaw to act jointly against Russia. In February, Berlin, Warsaw and Washington, in collaboration with Ukrainian far-right and fascist forces who lionise Nazi collaborators in World War II, organised a putsch against Ukrainian President Yanukovich. Since then, they have systematically worked to intensify the conflict with Russia.



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