

Merkel backs Ukrainian provocations against Russia

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Chancellor Angela Merkel has taken a clear stand on Ukraine's side in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in the Azov Sea.

Shortly before her departure for the G20 summit in Argentina, the Chancellor spoke to German and Ukrainian business representatives in Berlin in the presence of Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman. She sharply attacked Russia and declared that the Russian president is fully responsible for the present conflict, triggered by the intrusion of Ukrainian Navy ships into Russian territorial waters.

Merkel called on Russia to release the detained Ukrainian soldiers and to "not simply cut off" Ukrainian cities like Mariupol. She understood, she told the representatives of German industry who were present, that many of them "would like to have good economic relations with Russia", but here "fundamental principles are at stake". She promised to talk to the Russian president at the G20 summit to this effect.

The Chancellor did not go as far as to announce additional sanctions against Russia or the deployment of German warships to the Black Sea, as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had demanded. But she left no doubt that Germany would be on the Ukrainian side in the event of a further escalation of the conflict.

The West had guaranteed Ukraine the inviolability of its borders in the 1994 "Budapest Memorandum" in return for the renunciation of nuclear weapons, she said. "Therefore, we have a duty to stand by what we once promised."

By taking sides with Ukraine, Merkel is drawing Germany deeper into a conflict that has the potential to escalate into a major war or even a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia.

Ukrainian President Poroshenko is deliberately

fueling the conflict and has declared martial law because he sees this as the only way to prolong his rule beyond the regular election date of 31 March 2019. The regime of the wealthy oligarch, which came to power in a right-wing coup supported by the US and Germany four years ago, is embroiled in a swamp of corruption that reaches deep into the army, the secret service and the presidential apparatus. By contrast, the vast majority of the Ukrainian population live in a state of bitter poverty and insecurity.

All polls agree that Poroshenko has not the slightest chance of winning a halfway democratic election. That is why he is aggravating the conflict with Russia, either to prevent the election altogether or to carry it out in a fever of nationalist hysteria.

The US is using the Ukrainian conflict to increase its political and military pressure on Russia. It has encouraged and supported the Ukrainian provocation in the Azov Sea. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured Poroshenko that Washington would provide "full support, full assistance, including military assistance." (See: Ukraine's provocation in the Azov Sea)

That Merkel is dragging Germany into this explosive conflict and taking sides with the Poroshenko regime is irresponsible and criminal. Her course of action is reminiscent of the infamous "blank cheque" issued by Emperor Wilhelm II to Austria-Hungary in 1914 after the Sarajevo assassination. He gave the go-ahead for military action against Serbia, knowing full well that this would trigger a war with Russia and the First World War.

Merkel's taking sides with Poroshenko took place without a public debate or a vote in parliament. The media are also playing down the issue so as not to alarm the public. In the talk shows with their endless

palaver about all possible trifles, the conflict in the Azov Sea and its dangerous implications are not debated.

Merkel is continuing her policy of 2014, when the German government supported the coup against Poroshenko's pro-Russian predecessor Viktor Yanukovich. Although fascist parties and militias, such as the All-Ukrainian Union Swoboda and the Right Sector, played the leading role in the Maidan coup, it was glorified in Germany as a "democratic revolution".

Shortly before the Maidan coup, the German government had announced its intention to once again play a political and military role in the world corresponding to Germany's economic weight. The right-wing coup in Ukraine was the first test of these great-power politics.

However, unlike the US, which considers Russia its most important geopolitical rival after China, the German government did not want to push the conflict with Moscow too far. It depends on Russian energy supplies and also fears that an escalation of the conflict would increase its military and political dependence on the US. Merkel therefore negotiated the Minsk Agreement in cooperation with France, which "froze" the Ukrainian conflict without resolving it.

Against the background of ferocious US war threats against Russia, Merkel is now dropping the mediator's mask. She still promises to talk to Putin at the G20 summit. But given her accusations, this can only mean that she will increase the pressure on Russia.

The German government is striving to free itself from its military dependence on the US. It wants to build a European army in order to pursue its imperialist interests independently of and also against the US. But this is a long-term project, and until then it will continue to adhere to NATO.

Germany has played a leading role in the NATO military build-up against Russia. German soldiers have been stationed on the Russian-Lithuanian border for two years now, and in October the Bundeswehr provided one fifth of the 50,000 soldiers deployed in Norway in the large-scale manoeuvre "Trident Juncture" rehearsing war against Russia. Now Berlin is supporting the renewed provocations from Kiev and Washington.

It is backed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which is always on the front line when it comes to

beating the war drum. "Our security is at stake in Ukraine, but not only there. That is why the West must stand firmly on Ukraine's side," the paper announced on Thursday. A strong Ukraine was "in the elementary interest of the European Union".

The *F.A.Z.* considers a direct military intervention to be too risky. Instead, it recommends arming the Poroshenko regime more strongly. It calls for "assistance to Ukraine in building up its armed forces—organisationally, financially and, where necessary, with weapons". In addition, the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline should be stopped in order to "increase the cost of its policy for the Russian leadership".

The mixture of ruthlessness and recklessness with which the federal government and its leading media are heading towards a catastrophic war can only be explained by the deep, global crisis of the capitalist system, which is marked by blatant social inequality, trade wars and national conflicts. Unable to organize the modern, complex economy in the interest of society as a whole, the imperialist powers, like in 1914 and in 1939, are preparing a violent redivision of the world.

Russia has become a target of these imperialist intrigues, but the Putin regime has nothing to oppose them. It represents the interests of a criminal oligarchy and lives in fear of the working class. It reacts by stirring up nationalism, rearming on the one hand and looking for deals with different imperialist powers on the other hand.

Only an independent movement of the international working class fighting for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a socialist society can stop the relapse of humanity into war and barbarism.



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