NATO Secretary Stoltenberg calls for stepped-up targeting of China

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Speaking yesterday to the *Financial Times* of London, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg demanded that the military alliance intensify its threats against China. His remarks highlighted both the extremely aggressive policy pursued by the NATO alliance and explosive divisions emerging among the NATO imperialist powers.

Stoltenberg spoke as tensions mount between Washington and the European Union (EU), especially France, after the sudden signing of the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance against China. The alliance, which Washington negotiated for months without notifying the EU powers, led Australia to repudiate a €56 billion submarine contract with France. Paris briefly withdrew its ambassador to the United States in protest, and top French officials, echoed by several EU foreign ministers, criticized AUKUS.

Stoltenberg was returning from a meeting with Biden in Washington, where he also spoke at Georgetown University, provocatively demanding that NATO "step up and do more" to allow countries on Russia's borders to join the NATO alliance. His *Financial Times* interview was a barely disguised message from the White House calling for the EU powers to fall in line with the mounting US war drive targeting China.

NATO, Stoltenberg insisted, should target not only Russia but China as well. He criticized "this whole idea of in a way distinguishing so much between China, Russia, either Asia-Pacific or Europe," adding, "it's one big security environment, and we have to address it all together. … It's about strengthening our alliance to face any potential threat."

He denounced China, claiming it was a major security threat in Europe. "China is coming closer to us, for instance, in Africa. We see them in the Arctic. We see them in cyber space. We see China investing heavily in critical infrastructure in our countries. Of course, the fact that they have more and more longer-range weapons that can reach all NATO allied countries. … They are building many, many silos for long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles."

He announced that at next year's NATO summit in Madrid, NATO would directly target China and discuss China potentially overtaking the United States as the world's largest economy. "I expect that when we meet in Madrid the rise of China, the impact of China and the shifting the balance of power has on NATO will be thoroughly addressed in the new strategic concept, among other topics. China is not mentioned in one single word in NATO's current strategic concept," he complained.

Turning to the EU, Stoltenberg insisted that as they spend billions more on their armed forces, EU powers should avoid any competition with NATO. "NATO and the EU are working together, and we should not create any kind of contradiction," he said.

Asked about plans for an independent EU army championed by Berlin and Paris since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, Stoltenberg described them as potential threats to NATO security: "There are different interpretations of what [a European army] means. … If this means more European soldiers, battleships, drones, fighter jets, then it's something we strongly welcome and urge. If it means new structures competing for the same capabilities, then it will undermine our security. But I have been assured that is not the plan. So, we don't need new structures."

He also dismissed concerns in Paris over AUKUS. "I understand that France is disappointed. … But at the same time, this is an agreement which is not directed against Europe or NATO."

Stoltenberg's brief for military confrontation with

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China is a pack of lies and cynical evasions. First, the threat of war, including nuclear war, comes above all from NATO, not China or Russia. Since the Soviet bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO has constantly expanded its reach, waging bloody wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and beyond that cost millions of lives and left these countries shattered. NATO deploys troops on Russia's and China's borders—in the Baltics, Ukraine and Afghanistan—not the other way around.

China's vast growth over this period, based on providing cheap labor to transnational corporations from imperialist countries, exposes by contrast the stagnation and corruption of imperialism. This has emerged in a devastating fashion by the COVID-19 pandemic. NATO powers reacted with bank bailouts of trillions of dollars to the super-rich but called for "living with the virus," leading to mass infections and nearly 2 million deaths from COVID-19. China, which sought to eliminate the COVID-19 virus, suffered far less economic dislocation and kept deaths below 5,000.

Workers must be warned: NATO's warmongering threatens not only to trigger conflict with Russia and China, which are nuclear-armed powers, but conflicts between America and the European powers that twice in the 20th century erupted into world war. Indeed, Stoltenberg's warnings to the EU are simply more polite versions of US threats against the EU over its military plans. In 2019, US officials sent a letter denouncing an EU army as a "dramatic step back" for NATO, threatening the EU with trade war tariffs if it did not abandon the project.

While Washington threatens China most aggressively, workers cannot support any of the rival imperialist factions in NATO. All these powers pursue their own profit and strategic interests via the same methods: war abroad and police-state rule at home to impose the policy of "living with the virus" and intensified exploitation of the working class. This emerges very clearly in remarks of European foreign policy strategists.

Before Stoltenberg spoke to the *Financial Times*, Thierry de Montbrial, the head of the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) think-tank, spoke to French financial daily *Les Echos* on US-EU tensions over China. Montbrial said, "US foreign policy has entered a new phase at least since Obama, for objective reasons: they need to 'pivot' to Asia. Those who believed Joe Biden's election would bring back the good old days were wrong. The White House is now a bit more polite, but just as brutal."

He said this created a lasting divergence of interests between America and Europe. "We have no reason to leave the Atlantic alliance, but we have no interest in seeing it transformed into an anti-Chinese alliance. … French or European interests are far from identical with American interests," he said, adding, "On China, it's the same old story. The Germans have commercial interests there and do everything to protect them, like in Russia. No European country wants to be forced into a brutal confrontation with China. The issue is: How to deal with US pressure?"

He also dismissed comparisons between the Soviet military presence in Europe after World War II and a "new cold war" supposedly emerging between China and NATO. "The issues posed by China today are very different. Where is the Chinese threat in Europe today? Europeans have interests to defend. We must first identify them correctly. But we do not need a military alliance for that."

What Montbrial proposes is not peace, however, but only the pursuit of rival imperialist interests. He demanded "economic reforms," such as French President Emmanuel Macron's cuts to pensions and unemployment insurance, to free up more money for the military. As France wages war in Mali with EU assistance and keeps troops across francophone Africa and the Baltic republics, Montbrial insisted, "[o]ur neighborhood to the south and east should be our main focus."

Such remarks underscore the need to politically mobilize and unify workers in an international movement against war and the politically criminal official mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and for socialism.

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