Munich Security Conference targets Russia

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This year's Munich Security Conference was dominated by the escalation of war preparations between the USA and NATO against Russia.

Leading representatives of the imperialist powers—including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht (both Social Democrats, SPD), Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens), American Vice President Kamala Harris, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky—met in the Bavarian state capital to threaten Russia and fuel the conflict with the nuclear-armed power.

In his speech on Saturday, Scholz openly stated how acute the situation is. "War is looming again in Europe. And the risk is anything but averted," he explained.

Like all speakers, with the exception of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, he blamed Russia alone for the situation. "The deployment of well over 100,000 Russian soldiers around Ukraine" was "not justified on any grounds." Russia has "raised the question of Ukraine's possible NATO membership as a casus belli," although "no decision at all" is pending.

Then he threatened Moscow. At his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 15, he "made it clear: Any further violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity will have high costs for Russia—politically, economically and geostrategically." At the same time, he "emphasized that diplomacy will not fail because of us." He added, "Ultimately nothing less than peace in Europe is at stake."

Scholz's attempt to present himself as a broker "for peace" is absurd.

One does not have to support Putin's bankrupt Russian nationalism and militarism to acknowledge that NATO is the aggressor. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy 30 years ago, the military alliance has been systematically encircling Russia, contrary to all assurances at the time.

Altogether there have been five eastward expansions of NATO in the past two decades. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined the military alliance in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020.

NATO's insistence on Ukraine's "right" to now also become a member of the military alliance is part of a strategy to weaken and ultimately completely subjugate Russia. When Western representatives in Munich repeatedly cited Moscow's "violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," they were turning reality on its head.

Indeed, in early 2014, Washington and Berlin, working closely with fascist forces, orchestrated a coup against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych after he refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU). Since then, they have been systematically strengthening the right-wing, anti-Russia regime in Kiev in order to retake Crimea and Donbass, which opposed the coup by large majorities and were oriented toward Moscow.

The currently escalating confrontation is the result of NATO's systematic offensive, which is ever more openly taking the form of outright preparations for war. As early as 2017, the military alliance stationed four battle groups, each consisting of 1,000 soldiers, in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as part of the "Enhanced Forward Presence." These battle groups are currently being strengthened. At their meeting in Brussels last Wednesday, the NATO defense ministers decided to set up additional battle groups in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia.

In Munich, Harris boasted about further troop redeployments. "We have deployed an additional 6,000 American service members to Romania, Poland, and Germany. We have put another 8,500 service members

in the United States on a heightened sense of readiness. As President Biden has said, our forces will not be deployed to fight inside Ukraine, but they will defend every inch of NATO territory." She added that they will continue to support Ukraine with "security, humanitarian and economic assistance."

Zelensky's appearance underscored the extent to which NATO already regards the regime in Kiev as a close ally. To thunderous applause from those present, the Ukrainian President called for a "clear timeline" for the country's admission to the European Union and NATO and for the "the supply of the latest weapons, machinery and equipment for our army—an army that protects the whole of Europe."

He added threateningly, "I want to believe that the North Atlantic Treaty and Article 5 will be more effective than the Budapest Memorandum." In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine renounced nuclear weapons.

Scholz and Harris insisted in their speeches that Germany and the US fully support Article 5 of the NATO treaty. "Let me be clear: America's commitment to Article 5 is ironclad. This commitment is sacrosanct to me, to President Biden, and to our entire nation," Harris said. Scholz added, "Germany stands by the guarantee of Article 5—with no ifs and buts."

These statements have far-reaching consequences. Article 5 states that "an armed attack against one or more 'parties' will be considered an attack against all of them" and "that in the event of such an armed attack, each of... the party or parties being attacked Provides assistance… including the use of force of arms."

To put it bluntly: if the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which is being systematically fueled by right-wing extremist militias, spreads to include an eastern European NATO member, Washington and Berlin undertake to go to war against the world's second-strongest nuclear-armed power with unforeseeable consequences.

Nevertheless, in addition to the US, Berlin of all places, which attacked Russia in the Second World War and carried out a war of annihilation throughout Eastern Europe, is intensifying the war drive.

"The developments of the past few months in particular show us how necessary it is to continue concentrating on the topic of 'alliance defence' in the North Atlantic region. We have to muster the skills that are required for this," Scholz demanded. "And yes, that also applies to Germany. Airplanes that fly, ships that can set sail, soldiers who are optimally equipped for their dangerous tasks—a country of our size, which bears a very special responsibility in Europe, must be able to afford that."

Scholz left no doubt that Germany was taking part in the war effort against Russia in order to pursue its own geostrategic and economic interests as a major power.

"The European Union is our framework for action, our opportunity," he emphasized. "Remaining a 'power among powers' is what we're talking about when we talk about 'European sovereignty.' Three things are needed on the way there: First, the will to act as a 'power among powers,' second, common strategic goals, and third, the ability to achieve these goals. We are working on all of these."

At the beginning of the security conference, Social Democratic Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht called for another massive increase in the defense budget. On Sunday she repeated her appeal. "We will continuously increase defense spending," she announced at a panel discussion on the future of EU security and foreign policy. The goal of Germany's traffic light coalition government is to spend 3 percent of gross domestic product on defense, diplomacy and development aid in the future.

In the midst of the pandemic, which has already claimed more than 120,000 lives in Germany alone, this is a double declaration of war. While there are said to be no funds to fight COVID-19 and the government is ending all protective measures, tens of billions more are said to flow into the military. The working class must intervene on the basis of an independent socialist program to halt mass death from the pandemic and prevent a third world war.

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