

Spain: Podemos lines up with NATO's drive towards war with Russia

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is fully engaged in NATO's war drive to war with Russia over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Founded in 2014 by petty-bourgeois Stalinist and Pabloite forces that joined protests against the US-led 2003 Iraq war, Podemos boasted that it entered politics to "democratise" Spanish and European society and re-distribute wealth to the poorest. In government, Podemos has emerged as a militarist, pro-NATO party whose policies against Russia's invasion of Ukraine threaten to provoke a NATO war with Russia.

In January, Podemos cynically postured as a critic of the actions of the government of which it is a part, including the sending of Spanish warships to the Black Sea and fighter jets to Romania. However, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Thursday—the reactionary response of the Putin regime to NATO's imperialist encirclement of Russia—Podemos has junked its empty criticisms and lined up behind the war drive.

Amid deep opposition to war, with over half the population and two-thirds of youth opposed to sending troops to Ukraine, Podemos does not want to accidentally trigger an anti-war movement.

Instead, on Thursday, Podemos ministers went into action to support NATO's military threats and its refusal to negotiate with Russia. *Público* reported that Podemos "sources consulted by Público stress that there is a clear message of 'unity' on the matter, and there are no divisions with the [PSOE] socialist wing" of the government.

Deputy Prime Minister and presumptive future Podemos candidate Yolanda Díaz said, "We roundly condemn this attack and believe that the only way is diplomacy and international legality." She then joined the National Security Council to discuss Spain's role in NATO and the European Union (EU) to escalate tensions against Russia, including sanctions and arming Ukraine.

The Minister of Consumer Affairs and leader of the Stalinist-led United Left, part of Podemos, Alberto Garzón, tweeted: "My solidarity with the Ukrainian working people, who are suffering from imperialist aggression by Russia. An attack that violates international law and previous agreements reached to preserve peace."

In a statement, Podemos declared: "We strongly denounce the Russian military attack and urge its immediate cessation." It added, "We demand a military de-escalation and tension on all sides that reduces the risk of a war escalation in Europe." It concludes, "The memory of the mobilizations of the citizens against the war force the [Spanish] Government to work within the European Union and under the United Nations for the end of the war and the maintenance of peace."

This cynical posturing comes from representatives of Spanish imperialism and the NATO alliance, which goaded Russia to invade Ukraine. Madrid is currently providing nearly 800 soldiers on Russia's borders in Eastern Europe. The largest contingent is in Latvia, where it has maintained 350 soldiers since 2017, equipped with six Leopard battle tanks and 15 Pizarro armored vehicles. The Spanish soldiers are part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence operation and of a multinational battalion under Canadian command. On Tuesday, Spain sent an additional 150 troops.

In addition, Madrid has four Eurofighter jets and 130 soldiers at NATO's Graf Ignatievo base in Bulgaria. Supposedly to defend Bulgarian airspace, Spanish jets routinely extend their flight missions 150 kilometers into the Black Sea to face Russian jets. Finally, the Spanish Navy participates with three ships in two permanent NATO naval groups in Eastern Europe.

When Podemos entered government in January 2019, it carefully avoided proposing to withdraw these troops and ending the provocative encirclement of Russia. Instead, in December 2021, its ministers participated in a meeting to

approve additional mechanized units, combat aircraft and ship deployments in Eastern Europe.

Podemos now defends crippling economic sanctions against Russia that, together with NATO military action, threatens to escalate the Russian war in Ukraine into a global NATO-Russia war. It also defends sending weapons to the pro-NATO Kiev regime through the EU, cynically presenting it as more “progressive” than Spain sending these directly.

On Tuesday, Podemos parliamentary spokesperson Jaume Asens said it is “legitimate for the international community to provide aid to the [Ukrainian] state under attack.” Asens then joined the capitalist press in comparing the Russian war in Ukraine to Hitler’s invasion of Poland in 1939.

In fact, in this conflict, the NATO imperialist powers are indubitably the main aggressor, having worked systematically to encircle and threaten Russia since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union 30 years ago.

Podemos itself is pro-war party tied to all Spanish imperialism’s recent crimes. Before taking power with the PSOE, it recruited leading officers, including former Air Force General and Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez, who led the Spanish army’s participation in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Rodríguez is now a leading member of Podemos and the Deputy Prime Minister’s chief of staff.

Once in power, Podemos has aligned itself ever more closely with NATO wars in the Middle East, pledged to keep the four US military bases in Spain, and supported the increase of Spain’s weapons sales to a record €22.5 billion, including to Saudi Arabia in its bloody war against Yemen. It has also voted for the latest military budget, which rose 9.4 percent last year, beating its earlier record rise from €19.7 billion in 2020 to €21.6 billion in 2021.

Podemos’ bellicose stance is applauded in the bourgeois press. *El País* wrote, “Far from making noise, the Podemos’ ministers, who in January publicly disagreed with the PSOE by criticizing the sending of troops to Eastern Europe, have appealed this time to ‘diplomacy’ and ‘respect for international legality’ as the only way to resolve the conflict.”

20 Minutos wrote, “Podemos reacted quickly ... to make clear the unity” with the PSOE “on the Russian invasion, especially after the clash with [Defence Minister Margarita] Robles” in January.

As Podemos promoted the war drive against Russia, the

Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, PSOE, was busy phoning Spain’s former prime ministers. This included Felipe González (1982-1996), who sent troops to Iraq in the first Gulf War (1991), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1996) and Kosovo (1998-1999); Jose María Aznar (1996-2004), despised for participating in the Afghan and Iraq wars, that led to over a million deaths; and Jose Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, who joined the 2011 NATO war in Libya that cost 30,000 lives, including the torture and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

This list of calls, the pro-PSOE daily *El País* wrote, “has great symbolic value and shows the seriousness of the situation and the prime minister’s willingness to involve all his predecessors.”

The ruling class is using the war to cover up its prioritising of profits over lives in the pandemic, which led to over 122,000 deaths in Spain, savage austerity to pay for the EU bailouts, and rising inflation.

There is deep, historically rooted opposition in the working class in Spain and internationally to militarism and war threats against Russia. However, building an anti-war movement in the European and international working class requires a ruthless break with middle class, pro-imperialist parties like Podemos. It aims to isolate and suppress mass anti-war sentiment. If Podemos supports nominally “anti-war” protests this year, it will be to denounce Russia as fully responsible for the war in Ukraine and use it to escalate threats against Russia.

Only a united struggle by the international working class can prevent the ruling class from plunging the planet into the abyss. Workers and youth opposed this drive to militarism and war must build Trotskyist parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in opposition to pseudo-left parties like Podemos.



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