

PSOE-Podemos government escalates Spain's threats against Russia

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is escalating its threats against Russia, in line with the war drive of the United States, the European Union (EU) and the entire NATO alliance.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez travelled to NATO's military base of ?daži, Latvia, about 120 kilometers from the Russian border. Standing next to Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Kriš?nis Kari?š, NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Sánchez said: "NATO is united, the transatlantic link is stronger than ever, Putin has made a mistake, he is alone, the whole world is with Ukraine."

He claimed, "we are here because of Putin's brutal aggression. We are here to support our allies. But our main commitment is to peace. Our actions are deterrents."

It is not to defend the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine—its reactionary response to NATO's 30-year policy of militarily encircling Russia—to state that Sánchez's claims are absurd.

NATO battle-groups in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, once part of the Soviet Union but now part of the European Union and the anti-Russian NATO alliance, are set to almost double from 3,400 troops at the start of 2022 to more than 6,000. Sánchez announced that Spain will send an additional 175 troops to Latvia, beyond the 350 troops stationed there, as part of a wider NATO buildup in the region.

Currently, there are around 800 Spanish troops deployed in Eastern Europe against Russia, including a detachment of 130 airmen and four Eurofighter jets that regularly mount provocative missions from Bulgaria into the Black Sea near the Russian coast. There are also three Spanish warships patrolling the waters of the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea with NATO naval groups.

Last week, the Spanish government committed to send 1,370 C90-type grenade launchers, designed to destroy

Russian tanks, and 700,000 rifle and an undetermined number of machine gun cartridges for the Ukrainian army and its far-right militias. Spain has confirmed these are already being used by Kiev's forces.

On Wednesday, Defense Minister Margarita Robles restated her commitment to sending more weapons. Spain, Robles said, would send more war materiel if Ukraine "needs it." In typically Orwellian language, she concluded, "Spain and peace are the same thing," adding: "Our solidarity with Ukraine is total, so if they need it, we will send the material we have and that can help the heroic defense they are doing."

The day before, Robles had said Putin "should not go unpunished," affirming that his invasion should be "criminally prosecuted." Afterwards, the Spanish public prosecutor's office announced a probe of possible Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

On must recall the fate of heads of state accused of war crimes by the NATO powers. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi was tortured and murdered, Saddam Hussein sentenced to death and hanged by a kangaroo court in Iraq, and Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic died of a heart attack in a jail cell shortly after the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia denied his request to seek specialized treatment at a cardiology clinic in Russia. It is apparent, examining such a list, that Robles' statements about Putin are tantamount to death threats.

Sánchez is now lobbying the EU to finance gas interconnection infrastructure from Spain to the rest of Europe. Spain has Europe's largest network of regasification plants, which are key infrastructure in the current crisis, since they can unload liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments, as gas supplies from Russia are at risk of being halted by NATO. This would let European countries keep threatening Russia while relying less on its gas.

What accounts for Spain's aggressiveness in Eastern

Europe, beyond the lust for plunder of all the NATO imperialist powers? Above all, behind the Spanish ruling class's banging the war drums are the attempts to deflect internal class tensions outward. The war drive is intimately connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has deeply destabilised political life in every country.

Spain has had over 122,000 excess deaths, one of the highest number per capita in Europe. This is the direct results of the PSOE-Podemos' policy of prioritising profits over lives. It has suffered over 11 million COVID-19 infections. Nonetheless, the PSOE-Podemos government is lifting all mitigation measures like indoor masking, even as weekly deaths are still over 1,000 and weekly infections above 20,000.

This, before the rise of the BA.2 Omicron subvariant, which in Hong Kong has risen dramatically. Contrary to the narrative spun by the Sánchez government that the virus is now "endemic" and a stable "new normal" in place, the virus is once again spreading rapidly internationally, threatening to kill millions more worldwide.

Moreover, Spain is recording its fastest annual inflation since 1989, at 7.5 percent, while Italy records 6.2 percent, Germany 5.5 percent, and France 4.1 percent.

Sánchez, however, has cynically blamed Russia's invasion of Ukraine for the months-long surge in inflation. Last Wednesday, in a parliamentary session, he said: "It is important to tell the truth and not try to confuse," adding: "inflation and energy prices are the sole responsibility of Putin and his illegal war in Ukraine."

The truth is that inflation was already over 6 percent before the invasion, a by-product of the policies adopted by the ruling class in the US and Europe in response to the pandemic. This included pumping trillions of dollars and euros into financial markets to prop up share values. Further adding to inflationary pressures are disruptions in supply chains due to the refusal of capitalist governments to implement effective public health measures to halt contagion.

The current inflation hike after Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the product of a NATO strategy aimed at encircling and subjugating Russia. Directly violating earlier promises not to expand eastward after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO has expanded to include almost all major countries in Eastern Europe, apart from Ukraine and Belarus. Now, it is threatening to cut off Russian exports of energy and grain, driving prices of key commodities to record heights.

Inflation is now provoking a wave of class struggles and

protests that the unions can barely contain. Four thousand Spanish truckdrivers have announced a strike on Monday to "paralyze the country." In Cádiz, fishermen at Barbate have decided to moor their boats in an indefinite strike.

Meanwhile, the trade unions, in their role of policing the class struggle, are attempting to impose one collective agreement after another to enforce *de facto* wage cuts. According to data published on Thursday by the Ministry of Labor, the agreements signed until February accumulated an average wage increase of 2.3 percent. Thus, most workers continue to lose purchasing power: 8 out of 10 workers had a wage increase below the current inflation level.

These trends will not be stopped by "Left Populist" Podemos. Having made some token objections to sending weapons to Ukraine and its general secretary Iona Belarra even criticizing the PSOE as a "party of war," Podemos quickly shelved these empty criticisms.

On Monday, however, Podemos spokesperson Isabel Serra said: "Sánchez knows that he has our support, even if we think differently. Sánchez knows that in these difficult times he can count on Podemos even if we have these differences about what is the most effective way to achieve peace."

The two-year record of the PSOE-Podemos government shows that only an independent movement of the international working class, in irreconcilable opposition to Podemos, can stop the drive to war, attacks on living standards, and the murderous policy of mass infection.



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