

The Guns of April

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The United States and the NATO powers of Europe have set into motion a chain of events that is leading to World War III.

In her famed work on the outbreak of World War I, *The Guns of August*, Barbara Tuchman detailed how miscalculations, the ubiquitous belief in a brief and winnable conflict, and irreversible tactical maneuvers—the “ifs, errors, and commitments”—accumulated as the imperialist powers dragged the workers of Europe into the snarl of the trenches and the slaughter of the Great War.

A similar dynamic is unfolding in the US-NATO conflict with Russia. The US-supplied howitzers and massive deployment of weapons into Ukraine are sounding the Guns of April.

In mid-March, US President Joe Biden repeatedly stated that he would not allow direct conflict between the United States and Russia, because “that would mean World War III.” A month later, this is precisely what the Biden administration is doing.

On Tuesday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin presided over a meeting of the representatives of forty nations in a council of war assembled by Washington on its Ramstein Air Base in Germany, the headquarters for the US Air Force in Europe and the NATO Air Command.

Austin, fresh from a visit to war-torn Kiev, confirmed that the war in Ukraine is a war between US and NATO, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other. He announced that Washington would be assembling every month going forward a comparable international gathering of high-ranking military figures—which he termed the Ukrainian Contact Group—to “focus on winning” the conflict with Russia.

The aims of the war are now clear. The bloodshed in Ukraine was not provoked to defend its technical right to join NATO, but rather was prepared, instigated and massively escalated in order to destroy Russia as a

significant military force and to overthrow its government. Ukraine is a pawn in this conflict, and its population is cannon fodder.

The Ramstein war council was organized to plot the next stage in this scheme. Prior to and in the aftermath of the meeting, the US and other NATO powers announced the deployment of advanced weaponry to Ukraine, including anti-tank missiles, tanks and tactical drones.

The Contact Group, Austin declared, must “move at the speed of war.” In accordance with this direction, Germany announced Tuesday that it would deliver an unspecified number of Flakpanzer Gepard “anti-aircraft cannon tanks,” while Canada reported that it would be sending M777 howitzers, anti-tank munitions and armored vehicles. “The distinction limiting escalatory weapons,” which existed in the first weeks of the war, *Air Force Magazine* noted, “appears to have melted away.”

The pretense that the US and NATO are not at war with Russia has also “melted away.” Former US Army Europe Commander Ben Hodges stated on Sunday that the US aim in the conflict was “breaking the back” of Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov responded, accusing the United States of pressuring the Ukrainian government to sabotage peace talks and of conducting a proxy war in Ukraine. He warned that there was a “serious, real” danger of nuclear war. Austin dismissed Lavrov’s warning as “dangerous and unhelpful.”

What nonsense! Washington assembles a war camp and states that it aims to “break the back” of Russia. When Russia responds that such language and goals raise the danger of nuclear war, Washington declares this to be ... unhelpful.

The United States has made clear that it aims to crush Russia and topple its government. Faced with such an existential threat, the use of nuclear weapons becomes a

tactic the Russian ruling class will weigh. Washington is determined to win the war, the Putin government is determined to prevent that from happening. There is no way out for either side but escalation. Lavrov is in fact correct: nuclear war is a real and serious danger.

The real driving forces behind the war have emerged in the course of the conflict. The US and NATO powers goaded Russia into invading Ukraine, refusing to negotiate over Russia's demand that Ukraine not be made a member of NATO. Russia termed its invasion a special operation, signaling that it intended a contained, tactical maneuver to stabilize its position in the region.

The US, however, would not allow such a rearrangement and sought either to sink Russia in the quagmire of a "grinding occupation," or to organize its defeat. To this end, Washington worked to undermine all efforts at a negotiated settlement. The rhetoric of Washington justifying this policy has deepened the conflict. Biden accused Putin of war crimes, then of genocide, and called for regime change in Moscow. Each new formulation had an irreversible, escalatory character, a click in the ratchet of war.

Despite the massive and mounting infusion of military equipment into Ukraine—Washington has shipped more than \$3.7 billion worth of weaponry since the beginning of the war—the regime in Kiev has not been able to orchestrate the decisive defeat of Russia. The danger, seen from the standpoint of the US and NATO, is that Russia will be able to consolidate its control over Eastern Ukraine and the Black Sea coast. If the Ukrainian forces do not drive forward, then the advantage, at least from a military standpoint, shifts to Russia.

The development of the conflict, set in motion in the Oval Office and deliberated in the Kremlin, is increasingly in the hands of military men and it is reaching a point of no return. A decisive defeat of Russia in the conflict requires the ever more direct involvement of the NATO powers themselves, up to and including the deployment of troops.

With its arms shipments, sweeping declarations and councils of war, the United States has staked its entire credibility on the defeat of Russia in this conflict. "The stakes reach beyond Ukraine and even beyond Europe," Austin declared on Tuesday. The fate of American hegemony, including the credibility of its threats

against China, hangs in the balance. The reckless decisions made by Washington have thus become the major premise in the logic of further escalation.

Washington drags behind it the major powers of Europe, as it assembles, with the hubris of empire, a war camp on the continent. Britain has been deeply complicit in every escalatory step, and Germany and France are taking up their assigned roles. Washington gathers the military conspirators on a US airbase in Germany, the country which once launched Operation Barbarossa, holds the Germans as virtual bystanders, and plots its war with Russia.

The leaders of the imperialist powers, above all the US, are proceeding with a recklessness bordering on criminal insanity. But it is a recklessness that arises out of class interests and the logic of the capitalist crisis. Driving the escalation of the conflict are not only geopolitical interests but, even more significantly, the intractable economic, social and political crisis in every major capitalist country, above all the United States.

As was the case with World War I, the same contradictions that give rise to imperialist war also provide the impulse for world socialist revolution. Even as the war develops, mass protests and working class struggles are erupting throughout the world, fueled by the surge in inflation and historically unprecedented levels of social inequality.

The plans for world war are being implemented entirely behind the backs of the population. Workers must be alerted to the danger, and the growing struggles throughout the world fused with the fight against imperialist war and the capitalist nation-state system.

On May 1 at 3:00 pm US Eastern Time, the International Committee of the Fourth International is holding a May Day Online Rally to mobilize the working class against war. Visit wsws.org/mayday for more information or fill out the form below to register.



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