

German Chancellor Scholz criticised for trip to China

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Beijing on Friday, accompanied by a large business delegation, where he met with President Xi Jinping and head of government Li Keqiang.

It was the first trip of a G7 leader to China since the coronavirus pandemic broke out three years ago and since Xi cemented his power at the October Party Congress. It was met with fierce criticism both internationally and in Germany. The chancellor even came under attack from within the ranks of his own traffic light coalition, especially from the Greens.

For Scholz's predecessor Angela Merkel, such journeys were routine. During her 16 years in office, the German chancellor visited China a total of 12 times, Germany and China held joint intergovernmental conferences, and high-ranking Chinese representatives regularly came to Germany. In 2014, Xi Jinping traveled personally to Duisburg to commission a regular freight train connection between China and Germany as part of the New Silk Road Initiative.

But China has now become the target of the US and its European allies. The US is increasing economic and military pressure on the nuclear-armed power and preparing for war. The Biden administration's National Security Strategy describes the 2020s as the "decisive decade" in which the US will "win" the conflict with Russia and China. The European Union also describes China as a "strategic rival."

The war against Russia in Ukraine, which NATO is systematically escalating and intends to continue until it achieves Russia's military defeat, serves not least to deprive China of a potential ally. The fact that China is backing Russia in the Ukraine conflict with non-military support has provoked outrage in Washington and the European capitals. This is the context of the criticism of Scholz's journey.

"Some allies are concerned that the trip plays to a longstanding divide-and-conquer argument by Beijing that Berlin should distance itself from the US," writes the *Wall Street Journal*. The French daily *Le Monde* complained: "While the US plans to economically decouple itself from China and the European Union tries to distance itself from a

regime whose development is worrying, Berlin still seems to be setting itself up as 'business as usual.'"

European Commissioner for Industry and the Internal Market Thierry Breton, a Frenchman, warned Scholz: "The time for naivety is over. We must be on guard." The behaviour of the individual EU members towards China must be coordinated and not decided alone, "as China apparently prefers." French President Emmanuel Macron suggested that he and Scholz should fly to China together at a later date to demonstrate European unity, a suggestion which Scholz ignored.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) foreign policy expert Norbert Röttgen also attacked Scholz sharply. He accused him of damaging Germany's foreign policy during his trip, "because it costs us our partners' trust. It does not even strengthen our reputation with the Chinese, because they only react to strength and despise weakness."

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) warned the chancellor that he had to make it clear to Beijing "that the question of fair conditions of competition, the question of human rights and the question of the recognition of international law is our basis for international cooperation." One must "no longer be so fundamentally dependent on a country that does not share our values that we can be blackmailed in the end."

The falsity of this human rights propaganda is shown by the fact that Baerbock expressed it during a trip through Central Asia, where she courted the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Both have this year bloodily crushed protests and abused and imprisoned opposition members, which apparently did not bother Baerbock much. She pursued the stated goal of breaking the two successor states of the Soviet Union, which have large deposits of raw materials, from the influence of Russia and China, and binding them more closely to Germany.

With his trip to China, Scholz represents the same imperialist interests as Baerbock. Unlike the Greens, however, he believes that Germany must not become completely dependent on the US and allow itself to be

driven to an abrupt breakdown of economic relations with China. The sums of money involved are enormous.

The halt to gas imports from Russia, which Merkel and then Scholz had long resisted, has already had devastating consequences. Germany is now dependent on the import of expensive liquefied natural gas, including from the US. High energy prices are ruining many companies and exacerbating social tensions. The federal government has earmarked €200 billion to mitigate the consequences. But this is only a temporary measure, which will also exacerbate the financial crisis and lead to further social spending cuts.

A break with China would have even more serious consequences for the German economy, which is at the beginning of a recession. With 12.4 percent of imports and 7.4 percent of exports, China is Germany's largest trading partner. More than a million jobs are directly and many more indirectly dependent on China's trade. In addition, China is a supplier of important raw materials such as rare earths, intermediate products and goods for the energy transition, such as solar modules and car batteries.

The economic delegation accompanying Scholz to Beijing reflects the close economic interdependence of the two countries. The head of the Volkswagen and BMW car companies, which sold 40 percent and 33 percent of their cars in China last year, respectively, and maintain numerous plants there, were in the chancellor's delegation. The chemical group BASF, which plans to invest €10 billion in China by 2030, the pharmaceutical company Bayer, the vaccine manufacturer Biontech and the electrical group Siemens were also represented. In the third quarter of 2022, Siemens generated an eighth of its worldwide turnover of €18 billion in China.

However, Germany cannot afford an open conflict with the US, which is bullying China with increasingly stringent sanctions. This would not only have similarly devastating economic consequences as a break with China, but would also result in the US using its influence and military power to isolate Germany in Europe.

Scholz therefore performed a careful balancing act. He tried to use German influence over the Chinese leadership to put pressure on Russia. After the meeting with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, he said, "I told President Xi that it is important for China to use its influence over Russia." Both governments agreed that Russian nuclear threats were unacceptable.

Xi also warned of nuclear threats and called for peace talks. "As influential states, China and Germany must work together in times of change and chaos to promote peace and development," he said. Li distanced himself more clearly than before from the Russian policy. "We can't afford another escalation," he said. "We do not want regional

stability to be shaken, international production and supply chains to be destabilised."

At the same time, Scholz is trying to ease Germany's economic dependence on China without any abrupt break.

Before his departure to China, he explained the purpose of his visit in a guest article for the FAZ. He flattered China by saying it would "play an important role on the world stage in the future" and "remain an important economic and trade partner for Germany and Europe." At the same time, he accused China of unfair economic practices and threatened: "We will therefore reduce unilateral dependencies, in the sense of wise diversification." It is necessary to examine Chinese investments in Germany to determine "whether such a business creates or strengthens risky dependencies," Scholz continued.

Scholz has never left any doubt that Germany will side with the US and its allies in a further escalation of the conflict with China.

The German government already supported the right-wing coup in Ukraine in 2014, which ultimately led to the current war. At the same time, Berlin tried to maintain economic relations with Russia. When this was no longer possible, Germany became the most aggressive warmonger. It used the war as an excuse to triple military spending and to massively upgrade it in order to become Europe's strongest military power again.

The German government has also indicated to China which side it is on if the war should take place. The German military (Bundeswehr) participates with warships and aircraft in military manoeuvres directed against China. During his visit, Scholz delivered the usual accusations and threats. He warned China against a military intervention in Taiwan, which is being massively upgraded by the US in a similar policy to that previously pursued in Ukraine. He called for the universal validity of human rights and accused the Chinese government of persecuting Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. This was "not interference in internal affairs," Scholz claimed.



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