

Former German Chancellor Merkel admits the Minsk agreement was merely to buy time for Ukraine's arms build-up

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According to former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Minsk agreement served to buy time to rearm Ukraine. “The 2014 Minsk agreement was an attempt to give Ukraine time,” Merkel told the weekly *Die Zeit*. “It also used this time to become stronger, as you can see today.”

Merkel, who was also leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has made few public statements since she was replaced as chancellor by Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) a year ago, after sixteen years in office. The extensive interview published by *Die Zeit* on December 7 is a rare exception.

Behind the scenes, however, Merkel remains politically active. In her office, to which she is entitled as a former chancellor, she employs nine people, four more than approved—an office manager, a deputy manager, two desk officers, three clerks and two drivers. She maintains regular contact with Scholz, as he himself has reported. She had already cultivated a good relationship with him when he was still finance minister in the grand coalition government.

All the more remarkable is her admission that the Minsk agreement served to buy time for Ukraine's rearmament. “It was clear to all of us that this was a frozen conflict, that the problem had not been solved, but that is precisely what gave Ukraine valuable time,” Merkel told *Die Zeit*.

Previously, the Minsk agreement, which Merkel signed together with then-French President François Hollande, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin in September 2014, had been portrayed as an effort towards peace that the Russian president had allegedly later thwarted.

Now, Merkel confirms that NATO wanted war from the start but needed time to prepare militarily—an assessment WSWS has long held.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US has pursued the goal of remaining the “sole world power.” To this end, Washington has waged numerous criminal wars and expanded NATO into Eastern Europe. Now it also wants to integrate Ukraine, Georgia and other former Soviet republics into NATO and subjugate Russia in order to plunder its

resources and isolate China.

The German government is using the Ukraine war to press its claim to become the leading European power and a major military power. Merkel's third government, a grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and SPD, had placed this goal at the centre of its program in 2013. In terms of foreign policy, it thus follows the template of the great power plans of the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Empire) and the Nazi regime.

“Germany must be prepared to get involved earlier, more decisively and more substantially in foreign and security policy,” the then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), now Germany's president, had declared at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. Germany was “too big to comment on world politics only from the side-lines.”

Just two months after Merkel's third government took office, the US and Germany organized a coup in Ukraine in February 2014 that used fascist militias to help a pro-NATO regime come to power. Washington and Berlin had a problem, however. The dominant role played in the new regime by right-wing nationalists, admirers of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, and fascist militias divided the country. Especially in the majority Russian-speaking east, where the prospect of being ruled by Ukrainian ultranationalists was met with horror.

Russia, fearing for its Black Sea fleet base in Sevastopol, annexed Crimea with the help of a referendum. Russian-backed separatists proclaimed independent republics in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine.

The new rulers in Kiev were unable to prevent this. The Ukrainian army had fallen apart. Soldiers unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the new regime had deserted en masse.

Under these circumstances, Merkel and Hollande organized the Minsk agreement—as Merkel now admits—to freeze the conflict and buy time. The agreement included a cease-fire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, and the establishment of a security zone, monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Ukrainian government pledged to amend the constitution to allow special status for Donetsk and Luhansk and grant them greater autonomy.

Hardly any of this was ever implemented. In particular, the Ukrainian side boycotted all agreements. It did not want a negotiated settlement. Lacking soldiers ready to fight, the newly installed President Petro Poroshenko mobilized the Azov battalion and other fascist militias, which the billionaire oligarch partly financed from his own assets. They were integrated into the armed forces and sent into the breakaway regions to terrorize the local population and keep the conflict going.

The regime in Kiev—whether under Poroshenko or his successor Zelensky—and its backers in Berlin and Washington, were never interested in a peaceful solution. They were interested in buying time to escalate the war—even if this had disastrous consequences for the population of the affected areas.

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), which is close to the German government and has no sympathy for Russia, published a paper “The Donbas Conflict” in February 2019—three years before the current war broke out. It paints a devastating picture, which makes clear that the regime in Kiev has always been concerned with geopolitical goals in the Donbas conflict—linking up with NATO, isolating Russia—and that it was willing to ruthlessly sacrifice the fate of the Ukrainian population to these goals.

“The Kiev discourse on the Donbas war focuses almost exclusively on the geopolitical level and the relationship with Russia,” the paper says. The absence of a “local level of conflict” in this view has “serious consequences for the perception of the affected civilian population,” which is “perceived in Kiev as backward-looking, Soviet-influenced, unproductive, and authoritarian.” In the eyes of most interlocutors, “the Donbas cannot be about ‘reconciliation’ between individual ethnic or social groups.” From Kiev’s point of view, peace-building “will only be possible once the territories have been liberated, i.e., once they are once again completely under Ukrainian control.”

The SWP paper also candidly admits that fascist forces play a central role in Ukrainian politics: “Even though right-wing and far-right parties have not achieved significant success in elections since 2014, nationalist ideas have held considerable influence in the social debate over the conflict in the east (as well as on other issues). Time and again, nationalist actors succeed in forcing political leaders to adjust their policies.”

The SWP paper also addresses the devastating human and social costs of the war in eastern Ukraine. In 2017, for example, the “proportion of people without access to balanced nutrition” was 86 percent in the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and 55 percent in Kiev-controlled areas. Since 2014, tens of thousands of homes have been damaged and destroyed. According to the OSCE, both sides—but particularly the Ukrainian Armed Forces—targeted civilian property.

The regime in Kiev, it said, did not care. “Quite a few politicians in Kiev regard the Donbas as an unnecessary

economic burden and its population as backward-looking and politically unreliable. Its willingness to work to alleviate humanitarian hardship in the areas affected by conflict is correspondingly low,” the SWP paper says.

NATO used the “valuable time” (Merkel) gained by this terror to rebuild, arm to the teeth, and train the Ukrainian armed forces. For example, according to a British parliamentary report, the British Army has trained and equipped Ukrainian soldiers since 2014. Ukraine has not formally become part of NATO but is doing so in practice.

Russia’s decision to take military action against Ukraine was the predictable—and intended—reaction to this NATO offensive. That does not make it any less reactionary. The Putin regime represents the interests of the Russian oligarchs who looted the Soviet Union’s socialised property and are at war with the Russian working class.

But the claim that the war was triggered by Russia breaking into the “Garden of Eden” of Western democracy is a lie. The main responsibility lies with the NATO powers, which wanted and deliberately provoked the war.

Since the beginning of the war, they have been flooding Ukraine with state-of-the-art weaponry. They provide logistical support, determine attack targets, direct the fighting, and operate secretly in Ukraine with their own elite troops. They stifle any attempt at a negotiated solution. In reality, NATO has long been waging a war against the nuclear power Russia, risking the nuclear annihilation of mankind.

This danger can only be prevented by an international movement of the international working class that combines the struggle against war with the struggle against its cause, capitalism. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the International Committee of the Fourth International are building such a movement and arming it with a socialist perspective.



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