

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government sends Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine

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Yesterday, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government announced its first dispatch of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine. Six Leopard 2A4 tanks have arrived at northern Spain's Santander Port this week on their journey to NATO's Ukraine front line. The tanks, along with other armoured vehicles from Madrid, are expected to be deployed by the end of April. Another four tanks are being repaired in Seville and will be sent at a later date.

The tanks will be manned by 40 crew members and 15 mechanics who have undergone training at a military base in Zaragoza.

Spain's contribution is part of a nine-country plan to transfer over 150 Leopard tanks to Ukraine as part of a comprehensive escalation of the war by the NATO powers. Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands committed to refurbishing at least 100 Leopard 1s.

With the tank deliveries, the imperialist powers are pursuing the goal of strengthening its proxy Ukrainian army against Russian troops on the front in eastern Ukraine and possibly even going on a widely media-hyped counteroffensive.

The recent leaked Pentagon documents, however, have revealed that any military push by Kiev could be disastrous. In addition to having a severely weakened air force, the Ukrainian military is short on ammunition and artillery that the US and its European allies cannot admittedly provide.

Whether NATO goes ahead with the offensive, Washington and the European NATO powers are preparing an even deeper involvement in the conflict. They are determined to subjugate Russia, plunder its abundant resources and thereby tighten the military-strategic encirclement of China. NATO is currently planning a massive deployment of forces to the NATO member states bordering Russia, following the

accession of Finland into the alliance.

The deployment of tanks also intensifies the risk of direct Spanish and NATO involvement in fighting against Russia, and a massive military escalation. Since Kiev's ability to repair the tanks is limited, NATO will have to increase its presence on the ground, developing supply lines and repair operations, which will likely become targets of Russian attacks on the weapons systems flowing into Ukraine.

Despite the PSOE-Podemos government's lack of transparency about its war contribution, according to the Ukraine Support Tracker, which lists and quantifies military, financial and humanitarian aid promised by governments to Ukraine, the PSOE-Podemos government has so far sent €320 million in military aid.

This includes rifles, machine gun cartridges, grenade launchers, Hawk missile launchers, Aspide anti-aircraft missile systems, winter clothes and equipment, fuel, bulletproof helmets, armoured personnel carriers, howitzers and light vehicles. Many of these have been sent to the neo-Nazi Azov battalion. Madrid has also trained over 850 Ukrainian soldiers on Spanish soil.

The PSOE-Podemos government has also contributed over €350 million in financial support to the Ukrainian state to continue serving as a proxy for imperialist war with Russia.

It is clear that the NATO powers can only achieve their goal if they continue to increase their war effort. In this explosive context, US President Joe Biden is set to meet Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez at the White House on May 12.

Last week, White House Spokesman Karine Jean-Pierre announced that they "will discuss our unwavering support for Ukraine and our efforts to impose costs on the Kremlin as Russia continues its brutal war of aggression."

Madrid plans to sign an agreement to host two extra US destroyers at Spain's Rota Naval Base. The two warships will join the other four that the US has stationed at the base to complete NATO's anti-missile shield in southern Europe.

Last January, the PSOE-Podemos government authorised reinforced defence cooperation with Washington. This is transforming the Iberian Peninsula into a giant base for US operations in the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East.

Biden is set to meet with Sánchez as Madrid assumes the rotating six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union in July. The meeting will take place amid escalating inter-imperialist tensions that are leading to fierce clashes between the imperialist powers themselves—between the US and Europe, and between rival European powers, particularly France, Germany and Britain.

It will be held just weeks after French President Emmanuel Macron's trip to China revealed tensions with Washington over the offensive against China. On his return flight, the French President sharply distanced himself from the US's China policy. "Europe is in the process of creating elements of genuine strategic autonomy and should not fall into a kind of panic reflex and follow American policy," he said. Europe should not become a "vassal" to the US, and should instead be a "third pole."

In February, Sánchez announced before a large audience of government representatives from the 27 European states and 50 companies that the future Spanish presidency of the EU will seek greater strategic autonomy amid "a changing international order."

Sánchez said, "We must respond to this challenge and we must do so forcefully and with confidence. Knowing that, although we have serious vulnerabilities, we Europeans also occupy a geopolitical position of great strength." Key to this will be the meeting of the European Council in October in the Spanish city of Granada to discuss the future of "Open Strategic Autonomy" and other EU strategic priorities.

While flirting with the idea of strategic autonomy, Sánchez does not want to break ties with Washington. Sánchez distanced himself from Macron, warning about the danger of "overreacting" and recalled that "international fragmentation would not benefit anyone."

Above all, this reckless war policy shared by all factions of the Spanish ruling class once again exposes the pro-imperialist, anti-worker character of Podemos and its sister pseudo-left parties internationally. These include those like the German Left Parties, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France, and the Democratic Socialists of America. All of these pseudo-left groups represent a privileged upper-middle-class stratum which forms a social basis of support for imperialist war.

Last year, Podemos recognised that sending tanks would fuel the military escalation and threaten to trigger a nuclear conflagration, but pledged to continue to support the war effort. Podemos' protestations were empty rhetoric, seeking to obscure its role as a member of an imperialist government at the forefront of the NATO war on Russia. This time, however, Podemos has kept completely silent.

It is yet another political exposure of Podemos, which has joined in the entire Spanish political establishment's policy of imperialist war abroad and war on the working class at home. This government has implemented ruthless austerity for three years, implemented a profits-over-lives policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to over 160,000 deaths, murdered migrants on its borders, launched violent crackdowns on strikes and supported NATO's escalation of war with Russia in Ukraine.

Stopping a catastrophic military escalation requires mobilising the working class against Podemos and similar pseudo-left parties across NATO and internationally. May Day 2023 will be a vital step in the building of this movement. On Sunday, April 30, the *World Socialist Web Site* will hold an online global May Day rally to mobilize workers and young people around the world against the war in Ukraine. We urge all of those who seek to oppose the war to register today.



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