

German President backs delivery of cluster bombs to Ukraine

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On Sunday, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrat, SPD) backed US President Joe Biden's decision to supply cluster munitions to Ukraine. He told broadcaster ZDF that the official position of the German government to speak out against these internationally outlawed weapons was still correct, only to add, "But it cannot stand in the way of the USA in the current situation."

The fact that the German head of state is backing the delivery of cluster bombs just before the start of the NATO summit in Vilnius is a warning. In the Second World War, Germany's ruling class committed the greatest crimes in history with the Holocaust and the war of extermination against the Soviet Union. Now, once again, it will stop at nothing to pursue its imperialist goals.

The use of cluster munitions is illegal under international law and a criminal act per se. They are rockets and bombs that burst in the air and release countless small explosive devices, which are designed to kill and maim people indiscriminately. Not only Russian soldiers, but above all Ukrainian civilians would pay a terrible price for years to come.

In air strikes during the Vietnam War, the US dropped cluster bombs extensively on targets in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Between 1964 and 1973, over 270 million cluster bombs rained down on Laos alone, of which it is estimated that 80 million failed to explode. According to Wikipedia, more than 50,000 people were killed or injured by cluster munitions between 1964 and 2008, 20,000 of them after the war, while 23 percent of the victims were children.

NATO powers have also used cluster munitions in the wars of aggression against Serbia and Iraq, acts which violated international law. According to a Human Rights Watch report, the United States and Britain dropped nearly 13,000 cluster bombs over Iraq, containing an

estimated 1.8 to 2 million submunitions, with terrible consequences. For example, according to Amnesty International, many dead and injured people were admitted to the local hospital in Hilla on 1 April 2003, their bodies covered with cuts caused by shrapnel from cluster bombs.

Steinmeier knows exactly what crimes he is supporting with his statement. In the ZDF interview, he cynically remarked that he was "biased" with regard to the use of cluster bombs, since he had signed the international treaty banning cluster munitions in Oslo in 2008 as German Foreign Minister.

In the agreement, which entered into force on 1 August 2010, the 111 signatory states undertook "never to use, develop, manufacture, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer, directly or indirectly, cluster munitions to anyone under any circumstances." They were determined to "end the suffering and death" caused by cluster munitions. And the text said it was concerning that "cluster munitions remnants could kill or maim civilians, including women and children".

Fifteen years later, these are nothing but empty words for the ruling class. Phrases about disarmament, democracy, and human rights, which were always hollow, are increasingly replaced by open pleas to deploy the most terrible weapons of war. In order to avert the collapse of the Ukrainian war offensive and defeat Russia on the battlefield, Washington and Berlin are willing to use any means.

Speaking to ZDF, Steinmeier explicitly advocated an escalation of the war. At the moment, he did not see the conditions under which he could imagine a ceasefire, the German President said. "At this point in time, it would mean rewarding the theft of land that Russia is carrying out in Ukraine." As long as Russia did not withdraw its troops from Ukraine, he said, one must have "understanding for the fact that ... Ukraine is trying to

beat back the Russian troops.”

Steinmeier speaks for a ruling class that despite its monstrous historical crimes, is once again pursuing the goal of subjugating Russia in order to plunder its vast reserves of raw materials, and to rise to become a leading military power. For days, the warmongers in politics and the media have been competing with their demands to increase the war effort. All inhibitions are being dropped.

The WSWS has already commented on the recent commentaries in *Der Spiegel* (“Give Ukraine whatever it needs—That’s what a victory over Putin should be worth to us”) and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (“The counter-draft to Guttenberg”), which advocate unlimited arms deliveries to Ukraine and preparations for “tank battles” throughout Europe. Not only the content, but also the cynicism and lies being used are reminiscent of Nazi war propaganda.

“The moral outrage over the fact that the US now wants to supply Ukraine with cluster munitions, which are outlawed by many states, is unreasonable,” enthuses *Die Welt*’s chief foreign affairs correspondent Clemens Wergin in a commentary entitled “Why cluster munitions are morally justifiable for Ukraine.” While Russia “has been using this type of ammunition en masse since the beginning of the war, including against civilian targets,” this “cannot be assumed to be the case with the Ukrainians, who continue to try to abide by the rules of the international laws of war.”

One does not know which is more repulsive. Wergin’s double standard on war crimes, his glorification of the Ukrainian regime enforced by fascist forces, or the patently absurd claim that in the right hands weapons that violate international law are in accordance with the “international laws of war” and even protect the civilian population.

Others openly advocate nuclear escalation. Stefanie Babst, who was the highest-ranking German in the NATO General Secretariat from 2006 to 2020, complains in a commentary that NATO was unlikely to accept Ukraine “into its circle of members” immediately in Vilnius. A “glimmer of hope,” however, was perhaps “that the government in Warsaw has been seeking admission to NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangement for some time.”

According to Babst’s unscrupulous plan, the USA would station B61 nuclear bombs in Poland and Warsaw and equip the “existing F-16 and US ordered F-35 fighter aircraft with nuclear-capable delivery systems.” Should Warsaw then “agree to take Ukraine under its then existing nuclear umbrella as part of a bilateral security

agreement, the Kremlin would be forced to think harder about this new strategic dynamic.”

Another commentary in *Die Welt* penned by its Brussels correspondent Christoph B. Schiltz also advocates upgrading Ukraine militarily to the point where “it can win the war.” At present, “above all, long-range surface-to-surface missiles (ATACMS), mine-clearing tanks, F-16 fighter jets, anti-aircraft systems (Patriots, Iris-T) and artillery shells are missing,” Schiltz gushes. And unfortunately, “Biden, Scholz & Co are still betting on not provoking Kremlin dictator Putin too much.”

Such statements border on suicidal madness. Babst and Co. are literally writing a nuclear escalation of the war into being. They do not even waste a thought on the consequences. Warsaw, Berlin, and other major European cities would be the first targets of a nuclear war of annihilation.

In a perspective on the NATO summit, the WSWS has already warned: “If NATO’s military threatens to defeat Russia, Russia’s military doctrine is to use nuclear weapons, triggering a nuclear war in which the Russian nuclear arsenal alone is capable of destroying not only every major city in America, but of ending human civilization altogether.”

The madness of war has objective causes. Behind the increasingly aggressive posturing of the imperialist powers is a toxic mixture of geopolitical goals and a deep internal crisis. As in the 1930s, the ruling class is responding to the profound crisis of the capitalist system by turning to militarism, fascism, and war. The working class must counter this dangerous development with its own independent strategy and build a powerful international anti-war movement based on a socialist programme.



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