

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin insists no retreat in war with Russia at Ramstein

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US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin addressed Tuesday's meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group at Ramstein with one central message: NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine must be won, no matter what the cost.

Speaking at the US airbase in Germany, the front organisation for the NATO powers and allied states to wage war on Russia in Ukraine, Austin gave a brief address to the media before private discussions began.

He painted a picture of supposedly tremendous success in achieving the US aim of degrading Russia's military capabilities—at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives—claiming at least 315,000 Russian troops killed or wounded, a direct war cost of \$211 billion and fallout of \$1.3 trillion on “previously anticipated economic growth through 2026.”

Then came the warnings against retreat and the implications of defeat. “The United States will not let Ukraine fail. This coalition will not let Ukraine fail. And the free world will not let Ukraine fail,” he insisted. At stake was “our shared security, in European security, and in global security... Putin will not stop at Ukraine... Ukraine's survival is on the line. And all of our security is on the line.”

Austin came with two messages from Washington, both dictated by a crisis that is imperilling fundamental US imperialist war aims—that America is fully committed to the war, but Europe must step forward.

The paralysing of the Biden administration's funding for the Ukraine war demands that the European powers step into the breach if Ukraine is to avoid a threatened catastrophic military defeat.

Austin was tasked with calming European fears that Washington's ability to wage war against Russia is threatened by infighting between the Democrats and Republicans today, and that it could be shipwrecked if Donald Trump were elected president in November.

A \$95 billion supplementary military aid package, with \$60 billion scheduled for the Ukraine war, was passed by the US Senate last month. But it has been blocked by Republicans in the House of Representatives, who have made acceptance conditional on the Biden administration enacting Trump's anti-immigrant measures on the US-Mexican border.

The delay has accelerated the rout suffered by Ukraine's military and damaged confidence in US imperialism in Europe's capitals. The US is by far the biggest funder and supplier of the war, committing over \$44 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the NATO-provoked Russian invasion on February 24, 2022—around \$2 billion a month. Yet Ramstein saw Austin forced to hail \$300 million in additional security assistance for Ukraine that he admitted the US “were only able to support... by identifying some unanticipated contract savings.”

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has said this would provide Ukraine with ammunition to last maybe “a couple of weeks.”

Concern over a Ukrainian defeat was reinforced by last month's withdrawal from the eastern city of Avdiivka, after a four-month conflict. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns told Congress that Ukrainian units have told him they were down to their last few dozen artillery shells.

CNN reported March 11 that Russia is producing nearly three times more artillery munitions than the US and Europe combined, 3 million versus 1.2 million, and Europe has only provided a third of the shells promised for this year, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Yesterday CNN asked a European official how long Ukraine “might be able to keep up the fight against Russia without more US support,” who replied, “this is a question of weeks and months.”

Burns spoke for the CIA alongside Director of National

Intelligence Avril Haines to a meeting of the Senate Intelligence Committee last week that was extensively reported by the official US government propaganda outlet Voice of America.

Haines insisted that the \$60 billion military aid package “is absolutely critical to Ukraine’s defense right now” and “territorial losses in the past few weeks have exposed the erosion of Ukraine’s military capabilities.”

Burns warned, “The consequence of that will not just be for Ukraine or for European security but across the Indo-Pacific. If we’re seen to be walking away from Ukraine, not only is that going to feed doubts amongst our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, it’s going to stoke the ambitions of the Chinese leadership in contingencies ranging from Taiwan to the South China Sea.”

Ramstein was the focus therefore of demands by Austin that the European powers “dig deeper to get vital security assistance to Ukraine.” He listed the Czech Republic’s procuring 800,000 artillery shells and recent military aid packages from Germany, France, Denmark, and Sweden. He also announced that the first meeting of the Capability Coalition Leadership Group had been convened that morning, consisting of France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Poland and various smaller states as a new version of the “coalition of the willing” formed to fight the Iraq War in 2003.

“We’ll keep working together with all of the capability coalitions to identify gaps, to maintain cross-cutting needs, and to help Ukraine build a formidable force for the future,” said Austin.

He may have been anxious to publicly praise European efforts, but he will have made clear in private that far more is demanded of them. German thinktank the Kiel Institute reported the estimate of the latest Ukraine Support Tracker that Europe would have to double its current level and pace of arms assistance to Ukraine to compensate for lost US funding.

EU member states have provided more than \$30 billion in military assistance over the past two years, but fully \$19 billion comes from the second biggest aid supplier Germany, with the UK in third place with \$10 billion. Once again it was Germany which made the only concrete response to Austin’s demands, with Defence Minister Boris Pistorius announcing a €500 million aid package for Ukraine he said includes 10,000 rounds of ammunition.

He also stressed to the media his belief that the US remains a reliable partner. “I have no doubt about the reliability of the Americans. There are particularities in the political systems, and we have to deal with that,” he

said.

At a public briefing following the summit, Austin boasted that Ukraine Defence Contact Group member states had made more than \$88 billion in military assistance commitments in the past two years and that 15 allies have allocated more funds to Ukraine than the US, based on GDP share.

Even the brief glimpse of the confidential meeting revealed that, whatever their tactical disagreements, the US and European imperialists are united in their determination to wage war against Russia, no matter what the consequences.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has engaged in public rows with Emmanuel Macron as the French president has belatedly positioned himself as the most hawkish advocate of war with Russia, including sending ground troops to Ukraine. Britain has made open criticisms of Scholz’s reluctance to dispatch Taurus missiles capable of hitting Moscow and requiring German personnel in Ukraine because this would threaten open warfare with NATO.

But these are tactical disputes over how rapidly the conflict with Russia can be escalated, even at the risk of provoking all-out war with a nuclear power. What one French official grotesquely described to the *Washington Post* as an effort to “exploit all margins” and a “risk-management process” poses an existential threat to the entire world. As the same French official insisted in language identical to his US counterparts, “This support cannot stop because we all know we cannot afford to let Russia win.”

This growing danger must be met with the development of a mass anti-war movement in the European, American and international working class.



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