

The danger of nuclear escalation: What would be the impact of dropping atom bombs on Germany?

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“Never before has the danger of a third world war been as great as it is today. Nuclear war is being normalised,” runs the European election TV spot of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which was broadcast on public television for the first time on Tuesday.

Since the broadcast of the election spot, there have been increasing signs that NATO’s war against Russia is entering a new stage that could actually lead to the use of nuclear weapons. Earlier this week, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a Perspective on how leading NATO representatives—including British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and French President Emmanuel Macron—are threatening direct missile attacks on Russia and the deployment of ground troops in Ukraine.

Russia is reacting to the increasingly direct NATO war preparations with the threat of counterattacks. Moscow has also announced military exercises in which the use of tactical nuclear weapons is to be simulated. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the planned exercises a reaction to an “unprecedented level of escalation of tensions initiated by the French President and the British Foreign Secretary,” including “the intention to send armed contingents to Ukraine, i.e., to actually place NATO soldiers in front of Russian troops.”

With the NATO-armed troops in Ukraine having their backs to the wall, and the leading nuclear powers within NATO not ruling out the use of nuclear weapons in the event of war, Moscow even has to reckon with a possible pre-emptive nuclear strike against Russian targets. Despite the acute danger of a nuclear escalation, the imperialist powers continue to intensify their war offensive.

German imperialism, which already waged a war of annihilation against the Soviet Union during the Second World War, causing almost 30 million deaths, is playing a particularly aggressive role. On May 8, the German government used the anniversary of the country’s liberation from fascism by the Red Army to launch aggressive war threats against Russia.

At a press conference with Finnish President Alexander Stubb in Berlin, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats, SPD) welcomed the accession of the country, which borders directly

on Russia, to NATO and declared, “All for one, one for all. What was true for the Musketeers also applies to the NATO states.” They were “committed to each other,” would “protect and support each other” and would “defend every square centimetre of the Alliance’s territory.” To this end, they wanted to “further strengthen the eastern flank of NATO in particular.”

Scholz’s affirmation of NATO’s “duty to assist” has potentially catastrophic consequences. Article 5 of the NATO treaty states that “an armed attack against one or more” parties “shall be considered as an attack against them all” and the military alliance “shall render assistance, including the use of armed force.” In other words, if the war in Ukraine spreads to a NATO country, Scholz commits Germany, with the entire alliance, to go to war against the nuclear power Russia.

In fact, the ruling class is preparing to do just that. At the end of January, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD), who is currently travelling to the US and Canada, declared that Germany must prepare for a direct war with Russia. He cited “the next three to five years” as a period that must be “used intensively” to “arm ourselves” and make Germany “fit for war” again.

Since then, preparations for war are being driven forward even more aggressively. The Osnabrück Decree created the structural conditions for a “war-ready” army. At the same time, massive rearmament spending and the comprehensive militarisation of society is being accelerated. Pupils are taught “war lessons” in schools, the recent decision to introduce a “Veterans’ Day” to commemorate the infamous hero-worship of the Nazis and the planned reintroduction of compulsory military service are just a few examples.

At the press conference with Stubb, Scholz boasted that he had increased defence spending to over 2 percent of gross domestic product. In addition, the coalition government had “decided to permanently station a brigade in Lithuania” and “other extensive forces are on high alert.” Germany was “the hub in the heart of Europe so that allied forces can be deployed to the operational locations.”

The “Steadfast Defender” exercise is currently reaching its

climax. With a total of around 90,000 soldiers—including over 12,000 from Germany—and hundreds of tanks and aircraft, these are the largest NATO manoeuvres since the end of the Cold War. The exercise has the character of a veritable mobilisation for war against Russia. The official Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) website quotes Dirk Hamann, the colonel jointly responsible for the exercise, as saying they were rehearsing for “an emergency” and sending “a signal to the Russian side.” Earlier this week, Scholz himself visited German soldiers in the Baltic and attended part of the military exercise on a tank.

Speaking at this year’s International May Day rally, David North, chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, said it was “high time” for NATO leaders to

tell the people that their pursuit of ‘victory in Ukraine’ means risking nuclear war and describe in necessary detail what will happen to their countries and the world if the confrontation with Russia goes nuclear.

Scholz and the ruling class know exactly what consequences nuclear escalation would have for Germany in particular. As the much-vaunted “hub” of the NATO deployment against Russia, it would be one of the first targets and could be comprehensively destroyed in a nuclear war in the shortest possible time—with tens of millions of deaths.

A Greenpeace study titled “Effects of a nuclear bomb on Germany,” published in 2019, provides an impression of the extent of the destruction. The report discusses the impact of a nuclear bomb on three potential targets—the government district in Berlin, Germany’s financial centre in Frankfurt and Büchel Air Base, where the US nuclear weapons stationed in Germany are stored.

The first scenario describes the detonation of a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb on the lawn in front of the Reichstag (parliament) building. The study states: “Everything within a radius of 260 metres (0.22 km²) of the fireball is vaporised ... The parliament is located in this area.” The radius of the area with “severe explosion damage” would be 590 metres. In this area, “concrete buildings would be severely damaged or destroyed” and “the number of fatalities” would be close to “100 percent.”

It goes on to say: “Up to a distance of 1.41 kilometres from the explosion site and over a total area of 6.22 km²... people outdoors would receive a radiation dose of at least 5 Sv [sievert] due to immediate radiation. This radiation dose is fatal for most people, especially due to the additional injuries caused by the pressure and heat waves. People would die within a month.”

It would be particularly catastrophic since Charité, a large hospital, is located in this area and therefore medical staff would no longer be available. But Humboldt University, the

Tiergarten and the government district are also “within this radius. If the average population were taken as a basis, more than 25,000 people would be affected.” In total, the resulting pressure and heat waves alone would cause 26,760 deaths and 73,550 injuries. In addition, there would be around 120,000 deaths from radiation fallout and over 50,000 subsequent deaths from cancer.

Even more catastrophic are the effects described in the study’s second scenario, the dropping of a larger 550-kiloton nuclear bomb on Frankfurt am Main. Here, around 500,000 deaths would be expected as a direct result of the attack and around 165,000 subsequent fatalities from cancer. For the third scenario, the detonation of a 170-kiloton nuclear weapon in Büchel, the study calculates 130,000 immediate deaths and 80,000 subsequent deaths from cancer.

When leading politicians and the media provocatively declare that we should not be deterred by the Russian nuclear arsenal and such scenarios, it has an element of madness. But the madness of war, which goes hand in hand with massive attacks on the social and democratic rights of the working class, has an objective basis. “Biden, Sunak, Macron and Scholz are not insane people,” North said, “But they are the leaders of a capitalist system riven by crises for which they cannot find progressive, socially reasonable, let alone humane solutions.”

The working class must oppose the imperialist logic of mass extermination, which is already culminating in a new genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza, with a revolutionary socialist programme. The SGP’s election appeal for the European elections states:

The only legitimate conclusion that can be drawn from Nazi Germany’s war of extermination and the Holocaust, the worst crimes in human history, is this: The working class must never again permit war and fascism, and must eliminate once and for all the root of this horror, capitalism.



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