

German President Steinmeier on 80th anniversary of the end of World War II: “We must become stronger militarily”

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Germany—chastened by the memory of its historical crimes—must rearm militarily in order to defend freedom and democracy against Russia (and also the US). This, in summary, was the core message in the speech given by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on May 8 to mark the 80th anniversary of the surrender of Hitler’s Wehrmacht.

In one passage of his speech, Steinmeier referred to Victor Klemperer, a linguist of Jewish descent who survived the Nazi dictatorship in Dresden and whose diaries are among the best accounts of life in the Third Reich. He should also have mentioned the book *The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist’s Notebook*, in which Klemperer carefully analyses the language of the Third Reich (*Lingua Tertii Imperii*) and demonstrates how the Nazis turned terms into their opposite and repeated them stereotypically in order to manipulate public opinion. Steinmeier employed the same technique.

The Federal President spoke in the Reichstag building in front of the leaders of state and society, the members of the Bundestag (Federal Parliament) and the diplomatic corps. However, two diplomatic representatives were not invited: The ambassador of the Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union—which made the greatest sacrifices for the defeat of the Nazi regime with 13 million fallen soldiers and at least 15 million civilians killed—and the ambassador of Belarus.

Steinmeier justified this with “Putin’s war of aggression” against Ukraine and the “historical lie” that the war against Ukraine was a continuation of the fight against fascism, with which the Kremlin was concealing “imperial madness, grave injustice and the most serious crimes.” He promised to continue to support Ukraine militarily against Russia. “Leaving Ukraine without protection and defenceless would mean abandoning the

lessons of 8 May!” he asserted.

Steinmeier knows better. As the then German Foreign Minister in 2014, he was personally involved in the overthrow of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who had refused to sign an unfavourable agreement with the European Union. Steinmeier met with the leader of the far-right Svoboda Party, which is based on the traditions of Nazi collaborators during the Second World War, as well as other political representatives of Ukrainian oligarchs, to agree on the removal of the president and the transfer of power. The following day, armed fascist gangs forced Yanukovich to flee and NATO began to systematically rearm the collapsed Ukrainian army.

Putin’s attack on Ukraine was a reactionary response to this military encirclement by NATO. As a representative of the Russian oligarchs, who fear the international working class as much as the Russian working class, Putin could not appeal to the masses and had no progressive response to NATO’s advance. Presenting their war against Russia, which Germany has so far supported with €13 billion alone, as the “lessons of May 8” is the height of historical falsification.

The war aims to bring Ukraine with its rich natural resources under European—or American—control and to eliminate and split up Russia as a geostrategic rival in order to gain unhindered access to its raw materials.

But Steinmeier went even further in his speech. He made it clear that after two failed attempts, Germany is planning nothing less than a third grab for world power. “80 years after the end of the war, the long 20th century has finally come to an end,” he said. “The lessons of two dictatorships and two world wars are fading. The liberators of Auschwitz have become new aggressors.”

The United States, which played a key role in shaping the post-war order, is also turning its back, he continued.

“It is nothing less than a double epochal break—Russia’s war of aggression and America’s break with its values—it marks the end of the long 20th century,” said Steinmeier. With our history and experience, Germany is “particularly well equipped for the challenges of this period.” It must not freeze in fear and must demonstrate self-confidence.

“We must become stronger militarily,” Steinmeier demanded. He added: “Not to wage war, but to prevent wars.” But this is another stereotypical formula that turns reality on its head. Germany is already waging war—not only in Ukraine, where it is the second largest arms supplier after the US. It is also supporting the genocide in Gaza and sending warships to the Pacific to back the US’ preparations for war against China.

It is significant that the words “Gaza,” “Palestinians” and “China” did not appear in Steinmeier’s speech, while he explicitly praised “the miracle of reconciliation” that “the state of Israel has given us.”

He condemned “antiSemitism” in Germany—another term that he turned into its opposite, following the pattern of the language of the Third Reich. Anyone who denounces the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza is now considered an “antiSemite.” The images from the Gaza Strip are now worse than those from the destruction of Berlin on May 8, 1945. Numerous international institutions and courts have condemned the Israeli genocide as such.

Steinmeier, who is trying to reach a liberal, educated audience, does not go so far as to deny the criminal nature of the Nazi war of extermination. He leaves that task to others.

Bundestag President Julia Klöckner (Christian Democratic Union), who spoke before Steinmeier, also began her speech by acknowledging the “monstrous extent of German crimes.” However, she then turned her attention to the women and girls who had to endure sexual assault during the war and while fleeing. The greatly exaggerated figures of rape by the Red Army are a favourite topic of revanchist historians.

While their ambassadors applauded Steinmeier in the Bundestag, the foreign ministers of the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Ukraine published a joint article in the *New York Times* that openly states the real aims of the NATO war offensive.

The foreign ministers deny that the Red Army liberated Europe from fascism by equating the states that emerged after the war in Eastern Europe and East Germany with the Nazi dictatorship.

“We remember our fallen parents, grandparents and

other relatives who defended our freedom from two tyrannies of the last century,” they write. In addition to the victims of the Nazis, they commemorate the “millions of victims of Soviet repressions that continued unabated on the other side of the Iron Curtain at a time when Europe was reuniting and rebuilding itself after the war.”

In fact, numerous Nazi criminals were punished under Stalinist rule, while in West Germany even mass murderers made a career for themselves. The large landowners who provided many officers for the Wehrmacht and the capitalists who financed Hitler were expropriated, while in Germany they kept their fortunes earned over the bones of millions of forced labourers.

The Stalinist rulers suppressed their political opponents in the interests of a privileged bureaucracy. But they neither set up mass extermination camps nor waged wars of extermination. Today’s governments in these countries embody the criminal oligarchs who became rich by plundering socialised property during capitalist restoration and are eager to plunder Russia as junior partners of the great powers.

As “lessons from World War II,” the foreign ministers insist on the continuation of the war against Russia. They demand the complete return of eastern Ukraine and Crimea. “Appeasing the aggressor leads to more aggression, not peace,” they write. “Concessions on unlawful territorial claims are a disastrous mistake.”

They demand a proper evaluation of “both totalitarian ideologies—Nazism and Soviet,” the condemnation of all “crimes by the Soviet regime” before and after the Second World War, Russian compensation “for the occupational damage,” as well as “accountability for Russia’s current crimes, including after the future fall of Mr. Putin’s regime.”

These are the real goals that Steinmeier, the Merz government and their capitalist backers are also pursuing. They are dragging Europe into a third world war.



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