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How German imperialism is gearing up for World War III

Germany's ruling class is using NATO's war in Ukraine against Russia to aggressively reinvigorate militarism both at home and abroad. Recent speeches by Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht and Chancellor Olaf Scholz (both Social Democrats, SPD) leave no doubt about this.



German self-propelled howitzers 2000 before being transported to Lithuania at the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] base in Munster on Feb. 14. Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht (SPD) assured Ukraine of the delivery of four additional self-propelled howitzers plus ammunition on Sept. 19. [AP Photo/Martin Meissner]

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In a foreign policy keynote speech on September 12, Lambrecht said Germany must play a leading role not only economically and politically, but also militarily: “Germany’s size, its geographic location, its economic power, in short, its weight, make us a leading power, whether we like it or not. In military terms, too.”

Seventy-seven years after the fall of Hitler’s Third Reich and the terrible crimes committed by the Wehrmacht (Nazi Armed Forces) in World War II, Germany should once again be able to act as a war power, and the German army should be able to wage comprehensive wars. “We ourselves need strong, combat-ready armed forces so that we can defend ourselves and our alliance in case of need,” Lambrecht stressed.

On Friday, the chancellor himself followed up. In a speech at the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) conference in Berlin, Scholz told the assembled military leadership: “As the most populous nation with the greatest economic power and a country in the middle of the continent, our army must become the cornerstone of conventional defence in Europe, the best-equipped force in Europe.”

Both Lambrecht and Scholz spelled out that this means the complete militarization of German society and politics. “The Bundeswehr in particular will play a more important role in our political thinking and actions in the future,” Lambrecht declared. The time when the German armed forces were perceived “exclusively as an actor in crisis operations abroad or in assisting the civilian powers” was over, she said. “The Bundeswehr must once again be seen as a central authority for our provision of public services. And do so every day,” she added.

Scholz praised the establishment of a special fund of 100 billion euros for the Bundeswehr, which he had announced in the Bundestag at the end of February. At the same time, he made clear the gigantic sum was only the beginning and that the new “foreign policy epoch” he had proclaimed—a euphemism for the return of German militarism to the world stage—encompassed much more.

“The special fund is a reality. My statement that we will continuously increase the defence budget to 2 percent of gross domestic product also applies! You can count on that,” he assured the military. “The capability gaps of the Bundeswehr are large,” but they were in the process of “closing the most pressing of them very quickly,” he said. Priority was

being given to “combat aircraft, heavy transport helicopters, Eurofighters, the successor to the Marder infantry fighting vehicle, 130 corvettes and 126 frigates.”

Germany needed “aircraft that can fly, ships that can set sail, soldiers who are optimally equipped for their dangerous tasks,” Scholz growled. “A country of our size, which bears special responsibility in Europe, must be able to provide all this.” Germany also owed this to its “allies in NATO,” he said.

The strategy that the ruling class is pursuing in its third grab for world power was clearly outlined by Scholz. Germany is seeking to organize Europe militarily under its leadership in order to pursue its imperialist interests worldwide. As long as German imperialism cannot (yet) openly confront the US, rearmament will take place within the framework of NATO.

Among other things, the chancellor called for “a European headquarters [...] that can lead missions.” Perhaps the “most pressing problem in Europe” was “the completely confusing number of weapons systems and armaments.” Only the “coordinated development of European capabilities” would lead to “a Europe capable of action. In this context, he said, “the area of air defence is particularly important—coordinated at European level and as a contribution to strengthening the European pillar of NATO.”

Scholz boasted of Germany’s “leading role” in the NATO war offensive against Russia. “Precisely because of the substantial German contribution of 30,000 soldiers, 85 aircraft and ships,” he said, “NATO’s response capability and deterrent effect were being drastically increased.” Germany had “taken a leading role in all this from the very beginning—that was important to me.”

As a result, he said, “hundreds of German soldiers are in the Baltic states, in Romania, in Slovakia. Our navy and air force are increasingly patrolling the Baltic Sea and the eastern Mediterranean.” This, he said, provided “more than reassurance to our eastern allies.” Germany, he said, was “ready to take on responsibility for the security of our continent in a leading role.”

He then impressed upon in his audience, “Ladies and gentlemen, a new epoch—that means saying goodbye to old certainties. It means rethinking, also strategically. Within

NATO, we did this at the Madrid summit and with the new Strategic Concept. Our combat power and operational readiness will be significantly increased.”

Scholz preferred not to explain in more detail what NATO’s new Strategic Concept actually entails: Preparing for a nuclear third world war against Russia and China.

The Madrid document states, “We will individually and collectively deliver the full range of forces, capabilities, plans, resources, assets and infrastructure needed for deterrence and defence, including for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors.”

The cost of this madness will be borne by the working class—as cannon fodder in the war and in the form of billions in social attacks to finance the arms build-up. While rapidly rising energy prices and galloping inflation are already plunging millions into poverty, the traffic light government of the Social Democrats, Liberal Democrats and Greens is planning stark cuts in its current draft budget for 2023. The health budget alone is to be cut from €64 billion to €22 billion—and this in the midst of an ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has already led to some 150,000 deaths in Germany alone.

The official propaganda that NATO was merely responding to “Russian aggression” and fighting for freedom, human rights and democracy is a bold-faced lie.

In fact, NATO powers have systematically encircled Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with the aim of subjugating and dividing the resource-rich country so that it can be exploited by the imperialist powers. Putin’s invasion on February 24, 2022, was the desperate response of a reactionary capitalist regime to NATO’s offensive.

The return of German militarism has been long prepared behind the backs of the population and was publicly announced as early as the 2014 Munich Security Conference. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), as foreign minister at the time, declared that Germany was “too big and economically too strong for us to comment on world politics only from the sidelines.”

A short time later, this megalomaniacal claim was put into practice for the first time with the pro-Western coup in Ukraine. Even then, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist

Equality Party) analyzed the historical and political driving forces behind the war policy and warned of the enormous implications of the return of German militarism:

History is returning with a vengeance. Almost 70 years after the crimes of the Nazis and its defeat in World War II, the German ruling class is once again adopting the imperialist great power politics of the Kaiser's Empire and Hitler. The speed of the escalation of the war propaganda against Russia recalls the eve of World War I and World War II. In Ukraine, the German government is cooperating with the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector, which stand in the tradition of Nazi collaborators in the Second World War. It is using the country that was occupied by Germany in both world wars as a staging ground against Russia.

Now those plans are being put into action. Germany and NATO are waging a war in Ukraine against the nuclear power Russia, which they continue to escalate, supplying even more heavy weapons to Kiev following the debacle faced by the Russian army in northern Ukraine. In recent days, Germany announced the additional delivery of multiple rocket launchers, armoured vehicles and another four howitzers from Bundeswehr stocks.

In addition, German politicians and media are calling for Ukraine to be equipped with Leopard 2 heavy battle tanks. In the US, preparations are underway for the delivery of missiles with which the Ukrainian army can attack Russian territory. Although the danger of a nuclear third world war is acute, no one is talking about the possible consequences.

On the contrary, the policy of war and social spending cuts is being pushed forward primarily by the nominally "left-wing" parties in the Bundestag. With Scholz, the SPD supplies the chancellor and heads the defence ministry with Lambrecht. The Greens head the foreign and economic ministries and are the most aggressive within government pushing for the supply of heavy weaponry to Ukraine.

The Left Party also toes the same line. It unconditionally backs the war policies of the German government and NATO, a fact underscored by the recent controversy surrounding Sahra Wagenknecht. The former leader of the Left Party's parliamentary group in the Bundestag is being attacked not because of her outbursts against refugees, in the manner of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), but because she criticizes NATO's war course against Russia from the standpoint of German nationalism.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is the only party to oppose the war policy and the return of German militarism from the left. Together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, it is fighting to build a socialist anti-war movement. In doing so, it draws upon the enormous opposition in the working class, which is entering into fierce class struggles worldwide and will not allow the ruling class to plunge the world into a devastating third world war.

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