

Munich Security Conference: Threats and Provocations against Russia over Ukraine

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The 51st Munich Security Conference, held in the Bavarian capital at the weekend, was dominated by the escalation of warmongering against Russia by the imperialist powers.

All the protagonists to the conflict—including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, US Vice President Joseph Biden and US Secretary of State John Kerry—came together at the Bayerischer Hof luxury hotel. With Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in attendance, they used the conference as a platform to ratchet up the conflict with Moscow.

In her opening speech on Friday, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen praised Germany's leading role in NATO's arming of the Eastern European states and establishment of a rapid reaction force against Russia. "Germany is not only a framework nation and initial facilitator of the new NATO spearhead," she declared, "We are helping to build the Multinational Corps Northeast and set up NATO bases in NATO's eastern and southern member states." She boasted of the "tireless commitment of the [German] government to strengthening the role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and ensuring a united position of the EU in its relations with Russia."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg followed her. He praised the decision of the NATO defence ministers at their meeting last Thursday to upgrade their forces in eastern Europe as the "greatest strengthening of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War," and left no doubt that the measures were directed against Russia.

Although the imperialist powers provoked the Ukraine crisis and have systematically escalated their military, economic and diplomatic offensive against Russia, Stoltenberg cast Russia as the aggressor. "Here in Europe," he said,

"we see a dangerous pattern of Russian behaviour: annexation, aggressive actions and intimidation. The conflict in Ukraine is deepening, with a horrific cost to civilians. The causes are clear and cannot be denied. Russia continues to provide training, equipment and forces in support of the separatists. And it continues to destabilise Ukraine in utter disregard for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

On Saturday, German Chancellor Merkel spoke. Although she had only just returned, along with French President Hollande, from "peace" talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, she fiercely attacked Russia. She declared that Moscow's actions, "first in Crimea,

then in eastern Ukraine,” had “violated the foundations of our living together in Europe.” The “territorial integrity of Ukraine as well as its sovereignty have been flouted” and international law broken, she continued.

With regard to the discussions with Putin, Merkel tried to lower expectations. “It is uncertain whether [the talks] have been successful,” she said, “But it is my view and the view of the French president that it was in any case worth making the effort. I think we owe that at least to the people affected in Ukraine.”

In fact, the German government is largely responsible for the conflict in Ukraine, which has already cost more than 5,000 lives, forced hundreds of thousands to flee, and brought NATO and the US to the brink of war with Russia, a nuclear power. Berlin collaborated with Washington in backing last February’s putsch in Ukraine, utilizing fascist forces to bring a pro-Western regime to power to launch a brutal war against eastern Ukraine and stoke up the conflict with Russia.

The speech by Ukrainian President and oligarch Petro Poroshenko in Munich was virtually a declaration of war on Russia. He began by waving Russian passports in the air—supposedly proof of the presence of Russian soldiers in eastern Ukraine. Then he appealed to the West, particularly Germany, to supply weapons to the Ukrainian army.

The Ukrainian question would remain unresolved, he asserted, as long as Western officials refused to provide “solid, practical support.” Ukraine needed “defensive military support to ensure the ceasefire and containment of aggression,” he added.

In the course of the conference, a conflict developed over whether weapons should be supplied to the Ukrainian army, which now faces military defeat. While in the US the camp advocating the delivery of lethal weapons is growing, the representatives of the German government warned the security conference against such plans.

In response to a question from US Senator Bob Corker (Republican from Tennessee), Merkel said she understood the impulse to send arms. However, she said, the idea that weapons supplies alone would enable the Ukrainian army to proceed against a superior opponent was illusory. “It cannot be won militarily,” Merkel declared. “That is the bitter truth.”

Nevertheless, those opposing Russia were not weak or defenseless, Merkel said, because their strength was rooted in the economy. It was wrong to doubt the effectiveness of sanctions, she insisted. “I am 100 percent convinced that we will win with our principles,” Merkel declared, adding that “when some in the European Union say after just two months we can’t see any effect of the sanctions, then I can only say: ‘That’s not how you win the battle.’”

While the German government stresses that the conflict cannot be won militarily, and proposes to force Russia to submit through economic pressure, a section of the American elite is ever more aggressively advocating supplying weapons. Following Merkel’s speech, US Senator John McCain (Republican from Arizona) attacked the German government in an interview with broadcaster ZDF.

“If one looks at the position of the German government, one could believe they had no idea, or they couldn’t care less, that people in Ukraine were being slaughtered,” the former Republican presidential candidate and chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee said.

He asked whether Merkel wanted merely to watch “as a country in Europe was destroyed for the first time since the Second World War.” He added that he was disappointed with the Europeans, but had “expected nothing else.”

Despite the growing tensions between the US and Germany about further actions against Russia, both sides were keen to appear as united as possible before Monday’s meeting between Merkel and Obama in Washington. Secretary of State John Kerry tried to play down the differences regarding weapons deliveries.

“I assure you that there is no split, only people who are trying to create one,” Kerry said in his speech on Sunday. “We are working closely together.” The US was also seeking a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine conflict. “We all agree that this problem cannot be resolved militarily,” Kerry said.

Prior to this, his German counterpart, Foreign Minister Steinmeier, sharply attacked Russia once again. Moscow must “be clear that there is a good future for Russia only with and not against Europe,” he declared. The speech of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, who accused the US and EU of ratcheting up the conflict in Ukraine, had “not contributed anything,” Steinmeier added.

Behind the mantra of a “diplomatic solution,” the German ruling elite is preparing for war. The chairman of the Federal Armed Forces Association, André Wüstner, told *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*: “If you want peace, you must prepare for war.”

He called for a massive military build-up. “In order to achieve the optimum deployment capability of the German Armed Forces,” he said, the government must “gradually raise the defence budget over the coming years, from 2016, initially by one billion euros.”

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