

Europe on the brink of war

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Reports that Washington is considering arming the Western-backed regime in Kiev with weapons to attack pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine have placed the risk of world war at the center of political life in Europe.

Earlier this week, French President François Hollande warned of the risk of “total war” before jetting off to Moscow for talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin. These comments were echoed Friday by former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt.

“Unfortunately, war with Russia is conceivable,” Bildt told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in an interview at the Munich Security Conference. “We are definitely living through one of the more dangerous historical phases,” Bildt said, “especially if you view the situation from a European perspective. There is fighting to the east, there is fighting to the south. The flames are coming very close to us. What makes the situation so explosive is that there is also great uncertainty about global power relations.”

World capitalism faces a crisis as profound as those that twice in the last century—in 1914 and 1939—plunged humanity into world war. Tens of millions were massacred in the course of these imperialist wars, which would pale in comparison to the devastation caused by a Third World War waged by nuclear-armed powers.

The risk of a nuclear catastrophe has emerged largely behind the back of the world’s population and amid silence from a complicit media. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* did not ask Bildt the obvious question: If the Swedish government can now conceive of war with nuclear-armed Russia, is it taking into account, as it formulates its policy, the risk that nuclear missiles will explode in Stockholm? Does it believe that it is worth risking the annihilation of Sweden to defend the far-right regime in Kiev? How many millions of lives are the imperialist powers prepared to

sacrifice to the cold calculus of geo-political ambition?

While NATO governments have pointed to the historical character of the crisis they confront, none of them has any idea how to resolve it. Instead, they are pouring fuel on the fire. The imperialist powers are preparing to dispatch tens of thousands of NATO rapid reaction troops to Eastern European countries that border Russia while they send warships to the Black Sea.

Even as Merkel and Hollande met for peace talks in Moscow, ostensibly driven by concern over the implications of US weapons deliveries to Kiev, German Defense Minister Ursula Von der Leyen boasted of Germany’s participation in the rapid reaction forces that are aimed at Russia.

“Germany is not only a framework nation and key enabler of the new NATO spearhead force,” she declared, “but we are also helping to set up the Multinational Corps Northeast as well as the bases that NATO is establishing in its eastern and southern member states.” She praised “the untiring commitment of the [German] federal government to strengthen the role of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] and ensure that the EU adopts a common position with regard to Russia.”

As a possible alternative to US proposals to arm Ukraine directly, voices in Europe are pressing for more economic sanctions, including cutting Russia off from the SWIFT international transaction system—an economic blow that could itself be seen as an act of war.

In the meantime, the European media work relentlessly to pollute public opinion, denouncing the Kremlin as the aggressor and blaming it for the crisis over Ukraine.

Le Monde published an editorial Friday warning that “history is teetering between a localized if deadly conflict and a larger and more worrisome conflict... one of those chain reactions Europe knows all too well.”

The newspaper proceeded to place blame for the crisis squarely on Putin. It wrote: “Essentially, everything depends on one man: Vladimir Putin. Does the Russian president think he has punished Kiev enough for trying to ally with the European Union? Does he want to dial tensions down, or keep stoking war?”

Le Monde’s fairy tale involving a one-man chain reaction is part of a demonization of Russia that is based on absurd lies. Driving the war danger are the reckless actions of the imperialist powers, spurred on by their hegemonic ambitions and the intractable crisis of the capitalist system.

Washington and the European powers have been shaken by the global economic crisis, by their fading weight in the global economy, and by rising opposition to austerity within the working class. Terrified by what Bildt calls “uncertainty about global power relations,” they have sought to solidify their geo-political position by seizing Ukraine—by means of a putsch spearheaded by fascist paramilitary forces—and dealing a devastating blow to its neighbor, Russia, with the aim of transforming that country into a semi-colony.

Last year, Washington and Berlin led the NATO powers in backing a coup in Kiev headed by forces such as the fascist Right Sector militia. Having toppled pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, they installed a right-wing regime that imposed brutal austerity measures on the working class and sought to drown opposition in pro-Russian regions of eastern Ukraine in blood.

The NATO powers seized upon armed resistance to the Kiev regime in eastern Ukraine, such as in Crimea and the Donbass, to justify a military build-up in Eastern Europe. They have supported the Kiev regime’s war in the Donbass that has killed over 5,000 people and forced millions to flee their homes. Now that the Kremlin has signaled that it will intervene militarily to halt a broader offensive against the Donbass, the NATO powers are indicating that they are prepared to respond with total war.

To the war frenzy of the imperialist powers, the international working class must counterpose the strategy of world socialist revolution.

The threat of war has become a constant feature of political life. Recent years have seen a series of war scares—in September 2013, when the United States and France nearly attacked Syria; in 2014, when threats

were issued against Russia following the still-unsolved downing of flight MH17 over Ukraine; and now, over the war in eastern Ukraine. Absent a mass intervention by the working class in struggle against imperialism, one or another of these crises will trigger an uncontrollable war threatening the survival of humanity.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote last year in its statement, “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War:”

“The collision of imperialist and national state interests expresses the impossibility, under capitalism, of organizing a globally-integrated economy on a rational foundation and thus ensuring the harmonious development of the productive forces. However, the same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink provide the objective impulse for social revolution. The globalization of production has led to a massive growth of the working class. Only this social force, which owes no allegiance to any nation, is capable of putting an end to the profit system, which is the root cause of war.”

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