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New German Defense Minister visits German combat troops in Lithuania

Germany's new Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht (Social Democrats, SPD) made her inaugural visit to the German NATO combat troops in Lithuania, which have been stationed in Eastern Europe since 2017. The signal sent by the visit was unmistakable. The "traffic light" coalition of the SPD, Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens will further escalate German militarism, especially by stepping up confrontation with the nuclear-armed Russia.

"My first mission trip deliberately takes me to Lithuania. I came here because I want to support the clear signals of solidarity among the Allies," Lambrecht said during a joint press conference with her Lithuanian counterpart Arvydas Anušauskas. Germany stands "very firmly by the side of our partners and friends. And we are also continuing the excellent cooperation between our armed forces."

The Defense Minister added that the "common challenges" were "diverse." They had "spoken intensely about the situation on the Belarusian border."



German soldiers in Lithuania (AP Photo/Mindaugas Kulbis)

“The situation in Ukraine” is also “serious,” she said, and she can “understand the concerns of our Baltic allies” and “understand when one feels threatened.” Lambrecht declared that the situation had to be “resolved diplomatically,” but threatened Russia explicitly with sanctions and increased military armament.

“We have to keep an eye on the question of possible sanctions—and we’re doing that very intensively. And of course we also have to keep an eye on the question of deterrence and consistency—and we’re doing that too,” stated Lambrecht. She reported that “for example, Germany has increased the readiness of the rapid reaction force.” This is an “important signal that we also act when it is necessary.” Of course, they will continue to talk to Moscow, but “it cannot be that Russia tells NATO partners how to position themselves.”

This is more than provocative. Eighty years after the Third Reich’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, the German Defense Minister denied Russia the right to even criticize the threatening military build-up on its border. The stationing of German combat troops in Eastern Europe is directly in the tradition of the imperialist great power politics of the German Empire and the Nazi regime.

Before her trip, Lambrecht claimed in an interview with the *Bild* newspaper that Russia was the “aggressor.” This is an obvious lie. The NATO powers have been systematically encircling Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, Washington and Berlin organized a coup against pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych in early 2014

in close cooperation with fascist forces. Since then, the imperialist powers have been using Russia's primarily defensive reaction to systematically advance the course of war and rearmament.

The "excellent cooperation" of the NATO armed forces in Eastern Europe, praised by Lambrecht, is increasingly taking the form of direct war preparations against Russia. "Iron Wolf, Saber Strike, Flaming Thunder or Eager Leopard—combat exercises take place regularly at Enhanced Forward Presence," comments an article on the German army's official website entitled "EFP: Alliance Defense at the Eastern flank." In "combat exercises and maneuvers" they train "numerous scenarios—from house and position combat to delaying an approaching enemy."

In fact, it is the NATO units that keep advancing. According to a report by *Der Spiegel*, the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (Saceur), US General Tod D. Wolters, proposed a secret video conference with the military leaders of the allied NATO powers a few days ago, similar to the one in the Baltic states and Poland also to set up "battlegroups" in Romania and Bulgaria within the framework of the EFP.

The already existing "Battlegroups" were set up in 2017. They are each composed of about 1,000 soldiers and armed to the teeth. The German-led combat group in Lithuania has been led by the German-Dutch tank battalion 414 from Lohheide (Lower Saxony) since August, in what is now the tenth rotation. It is supported by other units, including parts of the Panzer Pioneer Battalion 130 from Minden and the 43rd Mechanized Brigade from Havelte. According to the German army, they are equipped "with a large number of large vehicles, including several dozen tanks (combat, recovery, pioneer, bridge-laying and armored personnel carriers)."

In its military march to the east, the German ruling class relies directly on fascist forces. In the summer, a complete armored infantry platoon from Lithuania was ordered back to Germany prematurely after it became known that soldiers had sung a birthday song for Adolf Hitler and had attracted attention through racist and sexist attacks. It is known that extensive right-wing extremist networks exist in the German army. They are systematically protected and used by the ruling class to enforce the return of German militarism internally and externally.

Lambrecht's interview with the *Bild* leaves no doubt that the traffic light coalition will further escalate the armament and war course of the grand coalition in every respect. When asked by the paper whether she was ready to "send German soldiers to Ukraine," she did not rule it out. One must "exhaust all options of diplomacy and economic sanctions. And all further steps must be closely coordinated in the alliance."

Similar to the new Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in an earlier interview, Lambrecht also gave her full backing for German nuclear participation and indirectly threatened Russia with nuclear weapons. Germany will replace "the air force [jets] that would carry American nuclear weapons to their target" by 2030 with new combat aircraft capable of deploying nuclear weapons, said the Defense Minister. In doing so, she will "weigh all options." In the case of the Eurofighter, it is necessary to "clarify whether and how quickly the USA would certify it for nuclear weapons." Germany would therefore "do well to also consistently investigate a European solution."

The German ruling class is pursuing the declared goal of organizing Europe under German leadership in order to assert its economic and geostrategic interests against the other great powers. That requires a massive program of rearmament. When asked by the *Bild* whether she "stands behind the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence," Lambrecht replied, "I stand behind the 3 percent target, as agreed in the coalition agreement and encompassing our military, diplomatic and development policy expenditures." It is "good that [the new Social Democratic Chancellor] Olaf Scholz has made it clear that he would like to provide the German army with better financial resources within the scope of the budget."

In the midst of the pandemic, this is a double declaration of war on the population. While there are allegedly no resources to fight COVID-19 and thousands die every week in Germany alone, tens of billions more are to be made available to the military to prepare wars that could cost even more lives and destroy the entire planet. The working class must intervene in political developments on the basis of an independent socialist program to stop this imminent threat.

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