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Alex Lantier

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At Berlin summit, Biden calls to continue Ukraine war, support Israel

An air of deep crisis and unreality hung over Biden's one-day meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday in Berlin. The four unpopular leaders pledged to maintain trans-Atlantic unity and continue the war with Russia in Ukraine.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and US President Joe Biden arrive for a photo at the Chancellery in Berlin, Germany on Friday, October 18, 2024. [AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi]

With the world teetering on the brink of a catastrophic military escalation, they discussed every critical question exclusively behind closed doors. None of them publicly addressed the horrific losses Ukraine has suffered or the risk that Israeli strikes on Iran could trigger war between Israel's NATO backers and Iran's allies, Russia and China. There were only veiled

allusions to the growing possibility of a collapse in US-Europe relations, particularly if Trump wins the US presidency or seizes it in a coup.

Instead, as Israel continues the Gaza genocide and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pledges to sell trillions of dollars in Ukrainian resources at firesale prices to NATO mining firms, Biden and his allies maintained their empty pose as stalwart defenders of freedom.

Yesterday, Biden received a medal from German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and effusive praise from Scholz at a joint press conference.

Scholz said, “It is thanks to your leadership that Putin’s plans failed, that Ukraine wasn’t overrun in a few days. But thanks to the bravery of Ukrainian armed forces and the support of many states—above all, the United States and Germany—Ukraine stands up to imperialist Russia since more than two and a half years. Together, we commit to Ukraine’s sovereignty and integrity so that Russia cannot subjugate Ukraine by force.”

Scholz saluted Israel’s gruesome assassination of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and called for “a diplomatic process as soon as possible” on Israel’s invasion of Lebanon.

Biden responded by hailing Germany as “my country’s closest and most important of allies” and applauding Scholz’s “decision to spend 2 percent of your Gross Domestic Product on defense.” Praising Scholz for coordinating with him on policy towards Israel and Iran, Biden concluded his remarks by stating: “I don’t see how we maintain stability in Europe and around the world without a tight German-US relationship.”

In reality, the NATO powers stand atop a mountain of corpses, from the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian dead to the Gaza genocide. They did not defend democracy in Ukraine, where Zelensky has suspended elections and rules as a dictator, but torpedoed a peace deal negotiated between Russian and Ukrainian officials at the outset of the war and used the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder to attack Russia. Zelensky’s offer to sell off Ukraine’s resources cheaply only reveals in broad daylight NATO’s ongoing plunder of Ukraine.

This has not created “stability” but global war. While the European imperialist powers have aligned themselves with the US-led wars, which gave them a pretext for unpopular cuts to social spending to boost military spending, the wars have vastly intensified objective economic tensions between US and European capitalism.

The European powers have suicidally acquiesced to US demands to cut off their energy supplies in Russia and supported Israeli action against Iran that threatens to end their access to Persian Gulf oil. With Trump threatening massive tariffs on European and Asian products,

they now fear a possible conflict with the American government with its grip over Europe's energy supply.

After the joint press conference with Scholz, Biden then met with Scholz, Starmer and Macron, gave a brief press conference at the Berlin airport shortly before 6:00 p.m.—barely 18 hours after his arrival—and flew back to Washington.

Biden pointedly refused to answer any question about Trump or whether the US elections could be violently contested. Asking if “his predecessor” had come up in discussions, Biden flatly replied: “I don't know who my predecessor is.” Asked if European leaders were “worried” about the US elections, Biden answered with two words: “They're interested.”

Biden made clear that he still supports Israel amid the genocide in Gaza and the growing danger of a regional Israeli-Iran war. He indicated that he knew how and when Israel would next take military action against Iran. Asked if he could reveal this information, Biden replied: “No and no.”

When asked about when NATO would authorize long-range Ukrainian strikes across Russia with NATO missiles, Biden indicated that he might do so later: “In—in foreign policy, there's never a, ‘Well, I never change my mind.’ Right now, there is no consensus for long-range weapons.” Biden claimed the NATO consensus on Ukraine is: “We're going to stay with Ukraine. We're going to make sure they continue to have capabilities.”

The pursuit of discredited war policies not only threatens uncontrolled military escalation, but enables the rise of far-right forces. None of the European leaders meeting Biden had, in the most recent polls, approval ratings over 30 percent. There is growing speculation that Scholz's government could collapse and call early elections.

But as Biden was leaving for Berlin, Trump publicly attacked Biden's handling of the war with Russia, demagogically posturing as an opponent of the war. While Trump was careful not to promise to stop sending arms and money to Ukraine to fight Russia, he attacked Zelensky: “Every time he comes in, we give him \$100 billion. Who else got that kind of money in history? There's never been. And that doesn't mean I don't want to help him because I feel very badly for those people. But he should never have let that war start. That war is a loser.”

Trump also blamed Biden for provoking the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine: “He instigated that war.”

What Trump proposes is not a peace policy, however, but a different path in military escalation and an attempt to militarily re-establish US hegemony over Eurasia. Trump has repeatedly indicated his support for a genocidal war against Iran, stating he could “wipe it off

the map.” But a US war with Iran would inevitably provoke a military confrontation with Russia and China, who are both strengthening their economic and military ties with Iran.

Trump has also repeatedly threatened both Europe and China with crippling tariffs that would lock their goods out of US markets by rising prices paid by US consumers. This is bound up not only with growing fears in the American ruling class about plans by countries, including Russia, China and Iran, to abandon the US dollar and to finance their trade in other currencies, such as gold. In a recent speech at the Economic Club of Chicago, Trump threatened:

If a country tells me, “Uh, sir, we like you very much but we’re going to no longer adhere to being in the reserve currency. We’re not going to salute the dollar anymore,” I’ll say, “That’s okay. And you’re going to pay a 100 percent tariff on everything you sell into the United States. We love your product, I hope you sell a lot of it into the United States, but you’re going to pay a 100 percent tariff.”

Such remarks are threats to strangle not only China’s economy but that of Europe, as well.

With Ukraine shattered and Israel on the brink of a regional war with far larger countries that it cannot win, NATO is faced with the choice either of defeat or escalating the war by intervening more directly against major world powers. But there is no “peace faction” in the imperialist ruling classes. Explosive divisions in ruling circles, particularly over the US elections, are not over whether to escalate but over what path to take to escalate the war.

Every escalation path would vastly intensify the economic crisis and social hardship facing workers internationally. Long-range strikes on Russia and sending NATO troops to Ukraine, bombing Iran to destroy its critical oil industry, or locking China out of world markets and militarily encircling it with US allies in Asia each have catastrophic implications. They involve the diversion of massive social wealth to the war machines, the risk of global economic collapse and the constant danger of nuclear escalation.

The only way forward is to build an international, socialist anti-war movement in the working class, to smash the political influence of the competing bourgeois parties and unify workers in a struggle against imperialist war and capitalism.