EU responds to US midterm elections with calls for military build-up

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Europe's political and media establishment is responding to the 2018 US midterm elections with calls for a military build-up to confront Washington and for legitimizing far-right politics.

It is ever clearer that the breakdown in trans-Atlantic relations following Donald Trump's election and his trade war measures against Germany and China was not a coincidence or a passing blip. European ruling circles are widely interpreting Trump's ability to extend Republican control of the Senate, though he lost control of the House of Representatives to the Democratic Party, as a sign that growing US-European conflicts reflect a deeper crisis than they originally believed. They are calling for their own aggressive military policy in response.

Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* daily wrote, "The 2018 congressional elections had a simple role: to determine whether President Donald Trump would be a temporary aberration in US history, or whether there is a more serious problem. … The answer is before us, and it is unambiguous: Trump cannot be written off as a historical stupidity." Trump, it added, "has awoken a force that is powerful, antidemocratic, and full of hate. Now it is clear that this force is here to stay."

In France, *Le Parisien* wrote that "the anti-Trump referendum did not happen," while the right-wing *Le Figaro* concluded, "Tuesday's elections has normalized a presidency that Democrats hoped to disqualify as a historical anomaly."

In Britain, even the liberal *Guardian*, which published a column by Richard Wolffe hailing the elections as a "story of suburban white female flight away from Trump" and a Democratic triumph meaning that "Trump's unchecked hold on power has come to an end," sounded a warning note. In a column titled "Don't be fooled. The midterms were not a bad night for Trump," Cas Mudde mourned that in just two years in office, "Trump has shaped the Republican party in his image."

The Reuters news service spoke of disappointment in European capitals: "Although few European politicians said so openly, the hope in Berlin, Paris and Brussels was that US voters would deliver a clear rebuke to Trump's Republicans in the midterms, forcing a change of tack and bolstering hopes of regime change in 2020. … But the outcome fell short of the 'blue wave' some had hoped for."

Even Democratic victories in the House, Reuters added, might only make US foreign policy more unpredictable and dangerous, given the Democrats' aggressive agenda. Against Trump, "while House Democrats could push for a tougher approach towards Saudi Arabia and Russia, they are unlikely to move the dial on his biggest agenda items: the trade conflict with China and hardline course with Iran."

Such policies are set to intensify geo-strategic and economic conflicts between US and European capitalism. European Union (EU) sanctions imposed on Russia at Washington's demand are costing Europe tens of billions of euros, and EU and US officials have clashed bitterly over the US scrapping of the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord, forcing European firms to abandon Iran. Trump's 2016 election campaign played a major role in bringing these conflicts into public view, notably when he denounced German auto exports to the United States as "bad."

Top European officials sounded calls for a military build-up, barely hiding that the target of their political and military collaboration would be their US "allies." German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declared, "We must find an answer on this side of the Atlantic to the 'America First' slogan. For me and for us, it is clear that it can only be 'Europe United.'" On Twitter, Maas warned it would be a "mistake to count on a course correction by Donald Trump. … We must reassess and realign our relations with the United States."

US threats of trade war tariffs targeting European and

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especially German auto exports are expected to continue unabated after the elections. “It will be uncomfortable for Trump but not better for Europe. In trade policy, little will change; many Democrats are rather protectionist,” Clemens Fuest, the head of the economic Ifo-Institute in Munich, told Germany’s *Handelsblatt*.

Perhaps the most bellicose statement came from French President Emmanuel Macron, who called for building a European army to defend against external powers, including the United States. “We Europeans will not be able to protect ourselves if we do not decide to have a real European army,” Macron declared in a Europe1 radio interview. Warning of “authoritarian powers re-emerging and rearming on Europe’s borders,” he called on Europeans to “protect themselves from China, Russia and even the United States.”

Warnings in official European circles on the militaristic and protectionist policies of both US big business parties show that US-EU conflicts go well beyond Trump’s boorish persona. These are conflicts not between individuals, but between US and European capitalism. Bitter inter-imperialist conflicts over markets, profits and strategic advantage—rooted in the final analysis in the contradiction between the world economy and the nation-state system—are exploding, after they twice plunged humanity into world war in the 20th century.

The criticisms in European ruling circles of Trump’s far-right policies, including his threats to have troops massacre immigrants along the US-Mexico border, are deeply hypocritical. The decades-long incitement of anti-immigrant hatreds by the European bourgeoisie is at a fever pitch, as it seeks to re-legitimize European fascism in order to create political conditions to divert hundreds of billions of euros from social spending into the army and the banks.

The period when the Berlin-Paris axis could posture as a democratic antipode to Trump is well and truly over. Already, German officials, including Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, have endorsed anti-immigrant neo-Nazi riots in Chemnitz and Dortmund, as factions of the state and media, including a cabal around right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski, try to whitewash Adolf Hitler’s record.

Yesterday, Macron took a major step in rehabilitating European fascism, by announcing that he would officially extend national honors to French fascist dictator Marshal Philippe Pétain during the November 11 centenary of the armistice that ended World War I.

Macron hailed Pétain, the head of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy régime that assisted the Nazis in carrying out the Holocaust of European Jewry and the bloody repression of the Resistance, as “a great soldier during World War I,” even though he “made fatal choices” during World War II. He added, “It is legitimate for us to honor the marshals that led the army to victory, as we do each year. My chief of staff will be present at this ceremony.”

To make clear his personal sympathy for the historic figurehead of French fascism, Macron added that Pétain “was a great soldier, that was a reality. Political life like human nature are sometimes more complex than one would like to believe.”

The force that offers a progressive alternative to this accelerating international disintegration of capitalism is the working class, mobilized on a socialist program. On both sides of the Atlantic, the period since Trump’s election has seen not only a hysterical shift towards the far right in official circles, but an upsurge of the class struggle and growing socialist sentiment and revolutionary moods among masses of workers and youth.

While polls have found that more American youth want to live under socialism or communism than capitalism, and that over half of European youth want to participate in a mass uprising against the social order, an initial wave of strikes this year has spread across both sides of the Atlantic. Teachers in America and Britain, US hotel workers, rail workers in France and Britain, airline workers at Air France and Ryanair across the European continent, and autoworkers and metalworkers in Germany and across Eastern Europe and Turkey have all mounted major strikes.

The critical question emerging from the US midterm elections is the fight to unify these struggles into an international movement for socialism against capitalism’s drive to war and police-state rule.

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