

Imperialist conflicts dominate Munich Security Conference

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The Munich Security Conference, which ended yesterday, laid bare a capitalist world order rapidly breaking apart and heading for disaster.

As the motto of the conference, the organizers chose the image of a fragmented puzzle and posed the question: Who would pick up the pieces. The course of the meeting made clear that the struggle over the pieces of the puzzle will prove to be no less violent and bloody than the two world wars of the twentieth century. Those attending the conference and the media made little attempt to disguise this.

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the general secretary of the Christian Social Union (CSU), Markus Blume, recalled the end of the Cold War 30 years ago, when “many expected a new epoch of perpetual stability” and Francis Fukuyama spoke of the “end of history.” “Today, in 2019, it all sounds like a report from another era,” Blume said. “We are experiencing dramatic changes worldwide of unprecedented scale, speed and radicalness.” Our world order was “unprepared for these fundamental changes.”

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented: “It is symptomatic of the times that problems can be largely analysed correctly, but that any intelligent formula for their solution is lacking. The vultures are circling—ready to swoop down on the remnants of the system.”

Besides NATO’s confrontation with Russia and the trade war between the US and China, conflicts within NATO itself dominated the three-day meeting, which was attended by several hundred heads of government, ministers, military experts and politicians. The intervention by US Vice President Mike Pence revealed the sharp differences between the US on one side and Germany and other European powers on the other.

Pence came directly from Warsaw, where he had forged an alliance with Israel, Poland and a number of Arab states to wage war against Iran. In Warsaw, Pence had ordered the United States’ European allies to “stand by our side” and threatened them indirectly with the breakup of the NATO alliance if they refused. “If you stand with us in this noble

cause, we will stand with you,” he declared.

Pence spoke in the same arrogant, commanding tone in Munich. He accused Iran of planning a new holocaust and seeking to obliterate Israel. He hinted that the US was preparing regime-change in Tehran and demanded that Europe ditch its nuclear agreement with Iran and support American sanctions instead.

Pence also vehemently attacked the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which is already under construction and connects Germany directly with Russia via the Baltic Sea. “We cannot ensure the defence of the West if our allies grow dependent on the East,” he threatened.

In the course of the Munich conference, the *Handelsblatt* newspaper, citing government circles, announced that the Trump administration is planning to classify German auto imports as a threat to US national security and levy customs duties—a new stage of trade war with grave implications for Germany’s export industry.

Pence also reiterated the demand for European NATO members to increase their military spending to two percent of GDP. He issued an ultimatum, demanding “credible plans” on how to achieve this goal by 2024. After his speech, the US vice president disappeared from the stage, without—as is usual in Munich—answering questions or listening to the speeches of other conference participants.

Representatives of Germany and other European countries reacted with outrage. Chancellor Angela Merkel gave what the press called an “unusually passionate speech,” which was met with a standing ovation. She opposed the accusations made by the American delegation and pleaded for a multilateral policy. She said she was convinced that “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and seeing if you can achieve common win-win solutions” was better than solving everything on one’s own.

Merkel’s call for multilateralism cannot hide the fact that Germany and Europe are also intent on ruthlessly pursuing their own economic and geo-strategic interests. In her opening speech, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen said that “the return of competition between the major

powers” is “the most prominent characteristic of the new security landscape.” She stated that “whether we like it or not, Germany and Europe are part of this competitive struggle. We are not neutral.”

Like von der Leyen, Merkel devoted large parts of her speech to listing what Germany and the EU have already done and still want to do in order to prepare a new round of military confrontations.

She expressly acknowledged NATO’s two-percent military spending target and praised German military operations alongside the US in Afghanistan and Eastern Europe. She laid great stress on the fact that Germany is now also active outside of NATO, particularly in Mali and other African countries. She advocated not only a European army and common arms policy, but also a common European armaments export policy, which amounts to loosening existing export restrictions on weaponry.

Heiko Maas, Germany’s Social Democratic foreign minister, summed up the German-European drive for world power with the formula: “Subject or object of world politics—this is the crucial issue of the future confronting Europe.” One newspaper commented: “The desire for European self-assertion is the leitmotif of this conference.”

While some conference attendees blamed US President Donald Trump individually for the sharp transatlantic tensions, others addressed more fundamental causes. Norbert Röttgen, chairman of the German parliament’s foreign relations committee, declared that Trump was not the cause, but rather a symptom of the tectonic shifts in geopolitics that have led to the return of great power rivalry and the centrifugal forces that are shattering multilateralism. “In the post-Trump era, there is no return to the pre-Trump era,” Röttgen said. “The status quo was that Europe’s security was guaranteed by the United States. That won’t happen again.”

The eruption of sharp conflicts between the US and Germany, which fought two world wars against one another, is accompanied by fierce conflicts between the European powers themselves. The relationship between France and Italy has hit a new low, and relations between Germany and France are also noticeably cooler.

This confirms the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which had already predicted in the late 1980s that the contradiction between world economy and the framework of nation-states, which undermined the Stalinist regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, would also lead to new conflicts between the major capitalist powers and a resurgence of the class struggle.

While the defenders of capitalism and their pseudo-left apologists claimed that the epoch of world socialist

revolution had ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the International Committee maintained that the 20th century remained “unfinished.”

“[T]he central economic, social and political contradictions that confront mankind at the start of the twenty-first century are, in the main, the same as those it confronted at the beginning of the twentieth,” wrote David North, the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, in the foreword to his book *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*. “None of the great social, economic and political issues that underlay the struggles of the century had been conclusively settled.”

The emergence of sharp conflicts between the NATO “partners” confirms this assessment. It is at the same time a sharp warning of the threat of a third, nuclear world war if the working class does not challenge the imperialist warmongers in time.

All over the world, the working class has entered into social struggles, including teachers in the United States, auto parts workers in Mexico and plantation workers in Sri Lanka. The ruling elites are responding to this upsurge of the class struggle by resorting to police state forms of rule, together with the promotion of nationalism and militarism.

At the same time, the intensification of the class struggle creates the objective conditions for the building of a new anti-war movement. As the ICFI explained in its 2016 statement “Socialism and the fight against war,” this movement must be based on the working class, which is the only truly revolutionary social force capable of uniting all progressive sections of the population. It must be “anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.”

Therefore, “the new anti-war movement must, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.” Above all, it must be “international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.”



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