

European governments demand massive arms buildup after Trump's threats to withdraw support for NATO members

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The European powers have responded to Donald Trump's threats to withdraw US military protection from NATO countries that fail to spend enough on rearmament with an outpouring of veritable war hysteria. The demands range from military autonomy to the development of an independent European nuclear weapon system.

Trump stated during a campaign appearance that as president he would not assist NATO members who do not invest at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product in the military in the event of a Russian attack. He added, "I would encourage them [Russia] to do whatever the hell they want."

European governments have responded to these comments by further accelerating their rearmament and preparing a nuclear war against Russia, against which they are already waging a proxy war in Ukraine.

For more than a decade, the leading European powers, with Germany at the forefront, have been carrying out a program of military rearmament in preparation for waging war against "great powers."

But in response to Trump's comments, European politicians have demanded that this go even further, openly broaching the militarization of the entire economy, the introduction of conscription and now also the possibility of a European nuclear weapon.

This is a recipe for war against the working class, for state repression and for far-right reaction. It cannot be implemented democratically. It will provoke an intensification of the class struggle, which is linked to the mass resistance to imperialism already manifested in the protests against the genocide in Gaza.

In a guest article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, German Finance Minister and Free Democratic Party leader Christian Lindner called for the development

of joint European nuclear weapons, which would also make Germany a nuclear power for the first time in its history. To date, the US has only stored nuclear weapons on German soil, and the US government decides on their use.

Lindner proposed responding to French President Emmanuel Macron's offers of cooperation, including making the strategic nuclear forces of France and Britain the basis of a European nuclear arsenal.

At the same time, Lindner made it clear that this is linked to a declaration of war on the working class, which must bear the costs of militarism. "The 'peace dividend' of the past was used, in particular, to expand the welfare state," he wrote. "Now we are at the beginning of the era of the 'freedom investment,' which is why a change of direction is necessary."

Katarina Barley, vice president of the European Parliament and lead candidate of Germany's Social Democrats for the European elections, as well as Manfred Weber, the German leader of the conservative group in the European Parliament, also discussed the development of independent European nuclear weapons. "On the road to a European army, this can also become an issue," Barley told the *Tagesspiegel*.

During his inaugural visit to Paris, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk called for Europe's politicians and societies to wake up. Europe needs a common defence policy and must become a strong continent, he argued. During his subsequent visit to Berlin, Tusk said that Macron's offer to Europeanise French nuclear weapons must be taken "really seriously." There is "no reason at all why the European Union should be militarily weaker than Russia."

Others consider it tactically unwise to raise the question of an independent European nuclear arsenal so openly at

this point in time, in view of Russia's superiority in the field of nuclear weapons—it has almost 6,000 nuclear warheads, while Britain and France have about 500 combined—and instead push for accelerated conventional rearmament as a first step.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned against undermining the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent, especially since America's nuclear umbrella for Europe is pretty much the only thing that has not yet been called into question in the Trump camp's strategy papers. German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius also described the nuclear debate as “the last thing we need now.” It is a “complex discussion that should not even be started.”

But these are tactical differences. On the issues of rearmament, war and class warfare, the entire European ruling class agrees. On the sidelines of a meeting of NATO defense ministers that took place yesterday in Brussels, Pistorius made the claim that Germany plays a leading role in NATO and is becoming the “backbone” and “logistical hub” in the defense of Europe. For the first time, his country had exceeded the 2 percent target for military spending, he boasted. Starting next year, it will provide the alliance with 35,000 deployable soldiers as well as 200 aircraft and warships.

Other European NATO members are also increasing their military spending. Eighteen out of 31 have now reached the 2 percent target. Ten years ago, only three had done so. And this is just the beginning. The European arms industry is also being massively expanded in order to be able to produce ammunition and weapons on a large scale again.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen intends to present a plan later this month to support the European defence industry with billions of euros of taxpayers' money and to join forces across borders.

Trump's threats only serve as a trigger for a further escalation of the rearmament spiral. Some comments have therefore welcomed Trump's statements as a “wake-up call.” For example, *Politico*, which is now owned by the German Springer publishing house, published a cynical article under the headline “Donald Trump just did Europe a favor,” which reads: “Trump's thunderbolt should help refocus Europe's strategic compass.”

The British journal *International Affairs* commented that Trump's comments were “a wake-up call for Europe's leaders and particularly those in Berlin, London and Paris... If Donald Trump cannot unite Europe's leaders in the defence of Europe there really is little hope.”

European rearmament is not only directed against Russia. Even if the European powers in NATO still work closely with the US, they are economic and geopolitical rivals. Both sides imposed trade war measures against each other during the Trump presidency, which were never completely lifted under Biden. And fierce tensions are also simmering between the European powers themselves.

Leading German politicians—headed by former Foreign Minister and current Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and former Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen—already demanded 10 years ago that Germany should abandon its “military restraint,” become the leading power in Europe, and once again play a political and military role worldwide that corresponds to its economic weight. In the same year, they supported the right-wing coup in Kiev, which set the course for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. The US, the EU and their member states have financed and militarily controlled the war with hundreds of billions of dollars.

The call for military autonomy and nuclear autonomy shows that the European powers, as well as the US, will stop at nothing to achieve their imperialist goals—not even at a nuclear war that would devastate Europe and threaten the survival of humanity. What drives them—as in the First and Second World Wars—is the irresolvable crisis of the capitalist system, which they try to solve by forcibly redividing the world and declaring war on their own working class.

There is only one way to stop the war, which is supported by all bourgeois parties, including the nominally “left” and the trade unions: the independent mobilization and unification of the European, American and international working class in the struggle against social cuts, dictatorship and war. This struggle must be based on a socialist program aimed at the overthrow of capitalism. This is the programme advocated by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections.



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