

European powers demand military build-up at emergency Paris summit on Ukraine

Alex Lantier**18 February 2025**

The major European powers held a crisis summit yesterday in Paris after US officials threatened to cut Europe out of Trump's talks with Russia over Ukraine in Riyadh. After Trump announced global tariffs on goods including from nominal US allies in Europe, and Vance denounced opposition to far-right populist parties as a "danger within" Europe, it is apparent that the Atlantic alliance between the United States and Europe is breaking down.

In Paris, European heads of state discussed plans for a doubling or tripling of military spending under conditions where they fear they can no longer rely on the United States. Plans for troop deployments to Ukraine, posing the threat of total war with Russia, face overwhelming popular opposition, as do plans to finance military spending by social cuts, like 2023 pension cuts that provoked mass strikes in France. Yet European governments are doubling down on policies massively rejected by workers.

The vast scope and antidemocratic character of European governments' policies point to the broader significance of Trump's return to office. Trump rules as a fascist—calling to annex entire countries, plunder \$500 billion in Ukrainian natural resources, carry out mass deportations of immigrants, and impose savage social cuts. However, the European powers' pursuit of their own imperialist interests is so unpopular that it also requires a turn towards authoritarian, police-state rule.

The Paris summit disinvited many European governments, mostly seen as too close to Trump or to the Kremlin. Hungarian, Romanian, Czech and Slovenian officials all protested their exclusion from the summit; far-right Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban called those attending the summit as "frustrated" leaders "who do not want peace." Nonetheless, the summit proceeded: German, British, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Dutch and Danish officials arriving at the Elysée presidential

palace yesterday afternoon.

Afterwards, NATO Secretary-General and former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte spoke to the press, proposing a European ground intervention in Ukraine in line with French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal last year.

Europe, Rutte said, is "wanting to put troops in Ukraine post a peace deal." Discussing this still entirely hypothetical peace deal, Rutte added, "Europeans [are] willing to step up, getting positively engaged, including with troops if necessary, but clearly with an American backup—so no troops on the ground, but a backup—enabling such efforts."

Posting European troops on Russia's borders, though Rutte cynically presented them as part of a "peace deal" between Trump and the Kremlin, means preparing broader war on Russia. This emerges concretely in media discussion of the US "backup" the European powers are demanding for intervention in Ukraine. They want US support in intelligence operations to identify Russian targets for attack, and to protect European troops from Russian air strikes.

Sources in the French general staff told *Le Figaro* it is planning deployments of European forces equivalent to an army corps to Ukraine, with France sending an armored brigade. *Le Figaro* cited defense analyst Yohann Michel: "Without US support, Europeans lack resources for key capacities such as intelligence and air defense... Until now, part of the management of the Ukrainian battlefield has been carried out in Washington."

While the Trump administration may refuse to provide the backup Rutte is asking for, European powers are responding not by shelving war plans. Rather, they aim to raise military spending so they can ultimately block attempts by Washington to cut them out of the division of the spoils in the region by waging war themselves.

Echoing Trump's demands that Europe spend 5 percent or more of its economy on the military, European Union

(EU) Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called for a “considerable” strengthening of EU militaries. At last weekend’s Munich Security Conference, she said: “Our defense spending has gone from barely €200 billion before the war to over €320 billion. We still need to augment this number considerably.”

EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius has called for a €500 billion increase in EU military spending, pointing out that every 1 percent of its economy that it devotes to war is “€200 billion more” for the military. If financed simply by cutting other spending, this would mean roughly doubling the cuts to non-military state spending imposed in Europe during the austerity offensive against the workers since the 2008 Wall Street crash.

A mood of profound crisis hung over the Paris summit, which was marked by deep and public divisions between the major European powers. However, they are united on a class line: War is to escalate, with the costs to be borne by the workers.

The conflicts in ruling circles are an inter-imperialist struggle over profits and strategic influence. While Paris and EU officials including von der Leyen call to buy arms from EU defense contractors, Berlin and Warsaw are buying arms from US, South Korean or Israeli manufacturers. There are also divisions over whether to finance war solely via austerity, or to also rely initially on joint EU borrowing or private loans from wealthy oligarchs. Most clearly, there are sharp divisions over when to send European troops into Ukraine.

London and Paris are, for now at least, the most aggressive in advocating rapidly deploying troops to Ukraine. “I am ready and willing to put British troops in Ukraine,” British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer told the *Daily Telegraph* before arriving in Paris, adding: “I do not say that lightly.” But he also stressed that this was to be considered only in conjunction with the US.

Berlin and Madrid were more circumspect still. While Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said it is “too early for now to discuss deploying troops to Ukraine,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said it was “much too early” to discuss sending troops to Ukraine, which is still “at the heart of a brutal war.”

These governments, which both spent billions on arming Ukraine, do not seek peace but have played a leading role in fueling the war against Russia. European troops sent to Ukraine today would be decimated, like Ukrainian troops, by swarms of Russian suicide drones and hypersonic missiles. Under these conditions, they are

proposing to bide their time and better prepare the ground intervention.

They are uncertain in part because Trump’s “peace deal” with the Kremlin has not been struck, and it remains unclear how far his trade war threats against Europe will go.

Under these conditions, European officials are signaling that they still desire collaboration with Washington. Macron personally phoned Trump as the Paris summit began. Starmer is visiting the US. Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, who has close ties to billionaire Elon Musk and the Trump administration, arrived 50 minutes late to the summit in a Maserati, after initially trying to downgrade the Paris summit to a video call.

Scholz said Europe’s Ukraine policy should proceed alongside Washington. Stressing that there “cannot be any dissociation of responsibility between Europe and the United States,” he called on Washington and Europe to “act together” on security. But waging war abroad to reshape the world map, whatever relations they preserve with Trump, necessarily entails waging class war on the workers at home.

Explosive class struggles are on the agenda on both sides of the Atlantic. To stop attacks on jobs and basic social rights, workers must consciously oppose the imperialist powers’ reckless war plans. The decisive issue is the full mobilization of opposition to war, austerity, and fascism among workers and youth, independently of union bureaucracies or political parties that have supported the war, and building an international socialist anti-war movement in the working class.



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