

Trump's plan to seize Ukraine's minerals and the mounting US-EU conflict

Peter Schwarz**17 February 2025**

The US and Russian foreign ministers are meeting in Saudi Arabia Tuesday to discuss the war in Ukraine and the restoration of bilateral relations. These talks have nothing to do with achieving "peace." Rather, they are another step in a global conflict that threatens humanity with nuclear annihilation.

The Trump administration exposed the real stakes last week when it sent Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to Kiev to propose a deal to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky: In exchange for past and future US support, Ukraine would cede half of its rare earth, lithium and titanium deposits—worth half a trillion dollars—to the US. Since the majority of these resources are in Russian-occupied territory, Trump needs an agreement with Moscow.

Whether such a deal will materialize remains uncertain. Washington has repeatedly mixed offers with threats of military escalation and economic sanctions. Trump is also pressuring Putin for concessions in the Middle East, where the US is preparing to expel Palestinians from Gaza and launch an attack on Iran, while also seeking to weaken Russia's alliance with China, the central target of the US war drive. As Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth stated last week, "The US is prioritizing deterring war with China in the Pacific."

Zelensky, who initially proposed the resource deal, hesitated to accept Trump's mafia-style demand, as it would effectively reduce Ukraine to an American colony. He also relies on support from the European imperialist powers, which are outraged by Trump's attempt to cut a deal with Putin at their expense.

"According to my calculations, we have provided Ukraine with more than €134 billion," European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told Reuters. "That makes us the biggest international donor." Kallas spoke bluntly about what she thinks of Trump's course: "It cannot be that Russia gets the Ukrainian territories, the

US gets the natural resources and Europe foots the bill for peacekeeping," she told Germany's *Tagesschau* news program. "That doesn't work. We have to mobilize our strength now."

This dispute—not concerns over "democracy" or "Western values"—is the root of the growing rift between the US and its European allies. Under Biden, the US and Europe coordinated their war against Russia. Now, European powers fear being cheated out of the spoils by Trump.

Recent actions by the Trump administration have made clear its contempt for its European "allies." First, Defense Secretary Hegseth questioned US security commitments to Europe and proposed a peace deal with Russia that would abandon NATO's previous demands: restoring pre-war borders and granting Ukraine NATO membership.

Then, Trump held a 90-minute call with Putin without informing his European allies. The two discussed reciprocal visits to Washington and Moscow and Russia's readmission to the G7. This led to the current US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia—excluding both Ukraine and the Europeans.

At the Munich Security Conference, Vice President JD Vance escalated the confrontation with an incendiary speech against the European Union. "The threat that I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia," Vance declared. "What I worry about is the threat from within." He accused European governments of suppressing freedom of expression and being afraid of their own people because they were supposedly building a "firewall" against far-right parties, such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD). He then met personally with the AfD's candidate for chancellor, Alice Weidel.

The European media reacted with fury. *Der Spiegel* declared that the Munich conference signaled "the end of the geopolitical order established after the Second World War." Headlines from the *Guardian*, *Die Zeit* and *The*

Economist described Trump's policies as an "assault" and an "attack" on Europe and accused the US of bringing about the "collapse of the transatlantic alliance."

The leading European powers responded by hastily convening an informal summit to discuss "the challenges to security in Europe." The meeting, held last night in Paris, was attended by the heads of government of France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, along with EU Council President António Costa, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.

The European response to Trump is no less reactionary than his own fascist policies. It is to rearm, rearm and rearm some more. The constant refrain that Europe has underinvested in its military and must now compensate for this "deficiency" has reached fever pitch. There is talk of increasing military spending to 3 to 5 percent of GDP, effectively doubling or tripling current defense budgets.

Such vast sums can only be extracted through brutal attacks on the working class, requiring the suppression of democratic rights and the establishment of authoritarian rule.

In her *Tagesschau* interview, EU Foreign Policy chief Kallas explicitly advocated for escalating the war in Ukraine to ensure Russia's military defeat—a goal that would require a massive NATO intervention given the exhaustion of the Ukrainian army. "For a country to get on the right track, it has to lose its last colonial war," she stated. "Russia has never lost its last colonial war, so it's up to us to make sure that happens. We can't go back to business as usual with them before then."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, set to meet with Trump soon, has already offered to send British troops to Ukraine as part of a so-called "peace" deal. French President Emmanuel Macron made a similar proposal months ago. In the *Daily Telegraph*, Starmer also demanded that European countries "increase our defense spending and take on a greater role in NATO." He envisions himself as a tie between the US and Europe.

The deeper reason for the sharp conflicts between the transatlantic powers is the deep crisis of world capitalism. NATO was founded in 1949 to contain tensions among the European powers—tensions that had led to two world wars—and to forge a common front with the US against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. While never free of internal rivalries, NATO largely avoided direct military conflict among its members.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO and its member states waged a series of imperialist

wars—including in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. But now, NATO itself is breaking apart. The so-called "rules-based order" is collapsing, giving way to the law of the jungle and the use of naked force.

The Trump administration is laying claim to Panama, Greenland and Canada and is not shying away from the threat of force. The Europeans are reacting by making themselves "fit for war."

V.I. Lenin explained this process in his classic analysis of imperialism, which he wrote during the First World War:

"Inter-imperialist" or "ultra-imperialist" alliances, no matter what form they may assume, whether of one imperialist coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing *all* the imperialist powers, are *inevitably nothing* more than a "truce" in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars; the one conditions the other, producing alternating forms of peaceful and non-peaceful struggle on *one and the same* basis of imperialist connections and relations within world economics and world politics.

This dynamic is now playing out within NATO itself. The sharpening transatlantic antagonisms, the global turn toward trade war and militarization, and the associated attacks on the conditions and democratic rights of the working class are placing enormous class struggles on the agenda.

This is the objective basis for the struggle against war. Only an offensive by the international working class, combining the struggle against exploitation and militarism with the fight against their cause, capitalism, can stop the madness of war.



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