

Amid disarray following Trump-Zelensky rift, Europe's leaders prepare for war

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2 March 2025

The leaders of all the major European powers—including Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—along with Canada, Turkey's foreign minister, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky—met at Lancaster House in London on Sunday to formulate a united response to US President Donald Trump's unilateral pursuit of an agreement with Russia over Ukraine.

The summit, convened by British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, not only confirmed the historic breakdown of US-European relations, but also underscored the European powers' response: a commitment to continuing and even escalating the war with Russia, including the deployment of up to 30,000 troops in Ukraine.

Starmer announced immediate plans to form a European "coalition of the willing" to enforce a peace deal in Ukraine, involving UK "boots on the ground and planes in the air." While still seeking US support in the form of an air defense "backstop," future plans centre on European military rearmament on a scale not seen since the 1930s.

Europe's leaders met in the wake of the explosive White House confrontation between Trump and Zelensky on Friday. Trump and Vice President J. D. Vance publicly berated Zelensky for being "disrespectful" to the United States by asking for "security guarantees" before signing a deal that would grant the US control over the lion's share of Ukraine's mineral wealth.

Trump sees the war in Ukraine as an expensive failure. He now wants immediate US access to Ukraine's rare earths and other strategic assets by negotiating a deal with President Vladimir Putin—one that Moscow has made clear would also grant the US access to Russian resources far exceeding those in Ukraine.

A defeat in Ukraine would be a major blow to the European powers, as would the US gaining a stranglehold on mineral deposits vital to the continent's economies. Even more alarming to the European powers is the

prospect of a broader US-Russia alliance, which they see as an existential threat. This is the real reason why the UK, France and other countries are now considering deploying troops to Ukraine, risking direct war with Russia—with or without US support.

At this stage, Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italy's fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and others insist that nothing will proceed without US approval, and any European proposal will be submitted for Trump's consideration. However, whatever attempts at a compromise are made and whatever the difficulties posed to London, Paris and Berlin, the direction is toward open conflict with Washington.

Trump's incendiary and sometimes erratic behavior follows a clear political and economic logic. A section of the American ruling class, epitomized by the world's richest man, Elon Musk, views Europe not as an ally but as a direct competitor. This group is willing to consider a political, economic and even military alliance with Russia to counter what they perceive as a greater threat to US strategic interests: the European Union.

Russia is a minor economic power, largely dependent on supplying the world economy with raw materials, fuels and foodstuffs. In contrast, Europe collectively is America's largest economic rival after China, with an economy 10 times the size of Russia's. Trump has repeatedly attacked the EU, calling it an "atrocious" deal designed to "screw" America. This week, he announced plans to impose 25 percent tariffs on European goods "very soon."

"America First" means Europe now comes last.

The NATO alliance, which has kept Europe under America's nuclear umbrella since the end of World War II, now faces an immediate threat. Musk made this explicit on Sunday by reposting a statement from leading Trump supporter Gunther Eagleman declaring, "It's time to leave NATO and the UN," adding his own

endorsement: “I agree.” He also amplified a post by Republican Congressman Thomas Massie, who dismissed NATO as “a Cold War relic that needs to be relegated to a talking kiosk at the Smithsonian.”

A significant aspect of Europe’s appeals—though nominally directed at Trump—is the calculation that powerful factions within the US ruling class strongly oppose Trump’s overtures to Putin. Represented politically by the Democratic Party, these forces harbor deep hostility toward Russia and see Trump’s threats to blow apart NATO and other pillars of the post-war order as a strategic threat to arrangements that have secured American hegemony for decades.

The European powers have long portrayed themselves as a restraining hand on American imperialism’s worst excesses. Today their disagreements with Washington centre on continuing the war in Ukraine, including Starmer’s pledge of an additional \$2 billion to buy air defence missiles.

The only constraint on Europe’s aggressive pursuit of its imperialist interests is the speed at which it can rearm. Across every European capital, the primary discussion revolves around accelerating military expansion.

The German ruling class is considering a special rearmament fund of at least €200 billion, in addition to the already spent €100 billion, while pushing for the conversion of key industries from civilian to military production. Meanwhile, the European Union is advancing proposals for a €500 billion “rearmament bank” to finance the continent’s military buildup.

The influential Bruegel Institute wrote, “Europe could need 300,000 more troops and an annual defence spending hike of at least €250 billion in the short term to deter Russian aggression.” *The Economist* cited a figure of €300 billion.

Trade and military conflict require the complete mobilization of society for war. Gutting the remnants of Europe’s post-World War II welfare state is the only way that the continent’s capitalist governments can pay for the military spending now demanded. And this means waging war against the working class.

Bemoaning an “indebted, ageing continent that is barely growing and cannot defend itself or project hard power,” *The Economist* called for a “fiscal revolution.” It explained, “Europe will have to cut welfare: Angela Merkel, Germany’s former chancellor, used to say that Europe accounted for 7% of the world’s population, 25% of its GDP but 50% of its social spending.”

The Bruegel Institute’s figure of a €250 billion increase

in defence spending in the short term is 5 percent of the EU’s roughly €5 trillion in spending on social programs (primarily pensions, welfare and healthcare) and education. Yet even this would only raise military spending to around 3 percent of GDP, up from the current 1.6 percent, while ruling class strategists are now openly discussing targets of 4 or even 5 percent.

This strategic imperative for the ruling classes of Europe—and not just the support offered by Trump and Musk—accounts for the cultivation of far-right parties, such as the Alternative for Germany and Meloni’s Brothers of Italy. They are the spearhead for the systematic attack on basic democratic rights and the constant scapegoating of migrant workers to promote nationalist reaction.

The massive protests and general strike in Greece on Friday underscore the rapid growth of class antagonisms, long suppressed by the trade unions, social democratic and Stalinist parties and their pseudo-left accomplices. As Europe’s governments escalate their assault on the working class, even larger and more intense social struggles are inevitable.

But these struggles must be guided by a new political perspective: the program of socialist internationalism, which unites the fight against war with the defense of living standards and democratic rights.

Workers and young people must reject all attempts to line them up behind one or another imperialist bloc, oppose all national divisions with their brothers and sisters internationally, and defy all attempts to impose the costs of militarism and war on their backs.

No faction of the ruling class—in America, Russia or any European country—represents democracy or offers any way forward to the mass of the world’s people confronting war and socio-economic devastation. That path will be forged by the socialist struggle of the international working class.



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