

European powers plan massive assault on the working class to ready militaries for war

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Top-level discussions this week, including meetings of military commanders and five European defence ministers in Paris, about a “coalition of the willing” to intervene in Ukraine underscore that the European imperialist powers are on the war path. Berlin, Paris, London, and other European governments intend to reduce their military dependence on the US by implementing unprecedented attacks on the working class.

A total of 34 NATO and non-NATO member states were represented at Tuesday’s meeting, which French President Emmanuel Macron billed as a major step in his initiative—supported by British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer—to create a military force capable of providing Kiev with “security guarantees” in the event of a ceasefire. Underscoring the rift that has deepened between Washington and the European powers since President Donald Trump came to power, the United States was not invited. Germany’s *Der Spiegel* noted that it was the first time since World War II that European chiefs of staff met in Paris without the presence of an American representative. Beyond the European NATO members, representatives from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada also participated.

No concrete commitment to deploy troops emerged from the discussion, which was supposed to include a session where participants would detail how and what they would contribute to the operation. The Elysee Palace released a pro forma report on the event, with Macron cited as saying that it was necessary to draw up a plan to “define credible security guarantees” for Kiev. “This is the moment when Europe must throw its full weight behind Ukraine, and itself,” he added. Macron acknowledged that the meeting had decided that any “security guarantees” would “not be separated from NATO and its capabilities.”

The following day, defence ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland held a further meeting. At a press briefing, French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu indicated that any military force assembled by the “coalition of the willing” would likely be deployed to the Polish-Ukrainian border rather than Ukraine proper, according to Germany’s *Tagesschau*. He stated that 15 NATO members had indicated a readiness to contribute to the deployment, but provided no details. A further meeting was planned for 15 days later.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius stated that three main areas were agreed at Wednesday’s meeting: joint European contracts for future ammunition to give the defence industry “planning security,” a review of national certification for military equipment to facilitate Europe-wide collaboration, and the development of European standards for weapons systems.

The European imperialist powers face a major geopolitical crisis following Trump’s turn to direct negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. They staked everything on the transatlantic relationship during the build-up to and after the US-instigated Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, including by breaking off much of their economic relations with Moscow, particularly the direct import of cheap natural gas. The European powers now fear being isolated between Washington on the one hand, possibly in alliance with Moscow, and Russia and China on the other.

On Ukraine, they worry that a peace agreement concluded following talks between Trump and Putin will cut them out of plundering natural resources that US imperialism hopes to hoard through a colonial-style agreement with the Zelensky regime.

Putin has also promised Washington opportunities to exploit natural resources on a far greater scale within Russia and the territory it holds in Eastern Ukraine containing 40 percent of Ukraine’s rare earths. The Europeans had hoped to seize Russia’s rich natural resources in alliance with Washington through their war to subjugate the country and reduce it to the status of a semi-colony.

Russian officials, among them Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, have repeatedly stated that the presence of NATO troops on Ukrainian territory is unacceptable.

Zelensky has declared that a force of 200,000 troops would be necessary to enforce a ceasefire. The European powers could at most supply by themselves a force in the low tens of thousands, with a recent *New York Times* article noting that even if Europe deployed 30,000 to 40,000 troops to Ukraine, it “could undercut NATO’s ability to deter Russia from testing the alliance in the Baltics.” Talk is now of a “stabilisation force” that would not be made up purely of troops, of which none would be on the “frontline”.

These challenges will not dissuade the European imperialists from seeking to use all means at their disposal to defend their interests in Ukraine and elsewhere. Macron and Starmer are forced to pitch their “coalition of the willing” as an initiative to be presented to Trump for his approval, but the course they are taking means deepening conflict with Washington and the readiness to wage open war with Russia, even without US support.

To equip themselves for these prospects, the European imperialists will have to massively intensify the onslaught on workers’ living standards.

Europe’s military dependence on the United States

The geopolitical crisis for the European imperialists, focused on Ukraine but embracing the pursuit of their interests in a violent redivision of the world that is well underway, is compounded by their dependence on

Ukraine and Russia

American military assistance to conduct major operations. For decades, the European powers have directed their defence spending and military assets chiefly through NATO, which the US has dominated since its founding at the beginning of the Cold War. Most European countries, with the exception of France, rely on US-produced equipment for their most high-powered capabilities, like fighter jets, air defence systems, and drones—and including Britain's nuclear weapons.

The European imperialist powers' military dependence on the US includes the ability to produce and maintain significant types of weaponry and mobilise adequate personnel. A study by the Bruegel and Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimates that the European powers would have to increase military spending by €250 billion each year, or 1.5 percent of the European Union's (EU) GDP, to compensate for an American withdrawal of military resources from the continent. As Jim Townsend, a former US deputy assistant secretary of defence, told the *New York Times*, "European armies are too small to handle even the arms that they've got now. The British and the Danes, to pick two examples, are good militaries, but they would not be able to sustain intense combat for more than a couple of weeks."

The US-made F-35 fighter jet, for example, requires regular software updates to continue operating, raising concerns in European capitals that Trump could disable the aircraft, much like his recent suspension of military aid to Ukraine, to get what he wants in a dispute with Europe. In Germany, discussions about withdrawing from a contract to purchase 35 F-35s for the country's "nuclear sharing" of US nuclear weapons is underway, with former Munich Security Conference head Wolfgang Ischinger, among others, indicating that the proposal to abandon the deal is worth considering. Under "nuclear sharing," German planes have been equipped since the Cold War with American nuclear weapons, which German pilots would fire if Washington gave the order. The possible breakdown of this arrangement prompted Macron to suggest recently that France could extend its "nuclear umbrella" to Germany.

But to realise their desire to act independently, Europe's imperialist powers would have to reorganise civilian industries for military production on a much broader scale. A report released earlier this week by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute found that European NATO members more than doubled their imports of military equipment during the period 2020-24 compared to the previous five years. 64 percent of total imports came from the US, as opposed to 52 percent between 2015 and 2019. Pieter Wezman, the study's lead author, pointed out that the US supply of arms to Europe has "deep roots." "European NATO states have almost 500 combat aircraft and many other weapons still on order from the USA," he said.

A war on the working class

To strengthen their ability to act independently of and potentially in opposition to Washington, the European powers are committed to a savage continent-wide onslaught on the working class.

Incoming Christian Democrat German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is currently in talks with the Social Democrats to adopt a financial package worth at least €1 trillion to invest in military rearmament and the modernisation of infrastructure to make the country war-ready. The proposal would remove all military spending of more than 1 percent of GDP from Germany's debt brake, allowing unlimited borrowing for war.

An estimate by the Federal Audit Office (Bundesrechnungshof) found that annual interest rate payments on the €500 billion infrastructure fund will amount to €12 billion after its 10-year lifetime expires, while the blank cheque for military spending could entail at least €25 billion in

annual interest, assuming defence spending grows by €500 billion and is not increased further. This would mean the removal of close to €40 billion every year from the regular budget just to pay the interest on the loans, not the loans themselves. This would amount to more than 20 percent of Germany's current annual budget for social services of €180 billion.

In France, Macron indicated after the summit of European leaders organised by Starmer in London March 2 that Paris would present a new proposal for the defence budget to parliament. French government officials admit that the plan to double the country's defence spending by 2030 is inadequate given Washington's looming reduced presence in Europe. Macron vowed that Paris would have to "review and increase" its defence spending targets. "For the past three years, the Russians have been spending 10 percent of their GDP on defence," Macron told *Le Figaro*. "We need to prepare what comes next, with an objective of 3 to 3.5 percent of GDP."

At the European level, EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen has unveiled a package of measures aimed at investing €800 billion in military spending, including €150 billion in loans provided by the EU and a relaxation of debt rules expected to facilitate investments worth €650 billion from EU member states. By removing defence spending from the requirement that governments borrow no more than 3 percent of their GDP, the EU has created additional pressure to cut budgets elsewhere.

In a recent perspective, the *World Socialist Web Site* took note of a call by *The Economist* for a "fiscal revolution" in Europe. The magazine noted the comments of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel that Europe accounts for 7 percent of the world's population, 25 percent of its GDP, and 50 percent of its social spending. We concluded, "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."

The working class must decisively repudiate the European ruling classes' mad programme of military rearmament and war. As the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, wrote in its recent statement "Stop the rearmament of Germany! Socialism, not war!"

The only social force that can prevent the catastrophe of war and fascism is the international working class, which creates all the wealth and bears the burden of wars and crises...

We counterpose the international unity of the workers to the growth of nationalism, trade war and rearmament. The war can only be stopped and social and democratic rights can only be defended if capitalism itself is abolished and replaced by a socialist society in which people's needs, not profit interests, take centre stage. The big banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control.



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