

# 80 years since the end of World War II in Europe

**Statement of the WSWS Editorial Board**

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The commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe are taking place amidst the resurgence of global war and fascism.

When the commanders-in-chief of the German armed forces ratified the surrender in Berlin on the night of May 8–9, 1945, the city lay in ruins. The German army had been decisively defeated. In the rubble, Allied soldiers uncovered evidence of the Nazis' monstrous crimes against humanity.

Just days earlier, soldiers of the Red Army had liberated the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin and the Berlin-Plötzensee prison, where thousands of resistance fighters had been executed. The scenes they encountered were of unimaginable horror.

Between 70 and 85 million people perished in the Second World War, including up to 55 million civilians. The Nazis' war of extermination claimed the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens, and 6 million Jews were systematically murdered in the Holocaust.

The war as a whole came to an end four months later, with Japan's surrender following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by American imperialism.

The anniversary of "V-E Day" (Victory in Europe Day) is being commemorated under conditions of escalating global conflict. The world is not merely on the brink of world war—the initial stages have already begun. Current zones of conflict and flashpoints stretch from Europe to the Middle East and Asia—and even extend into the Arctic and outer space.

In Ukraine, the United States and European powers are waging the largest land war in Europe since World War II, aimed at weakening and dismembering Russia. Now in its fourth year, the conflict has already killed or wounded over 1 million people. With Trump's return to power, the European powers are openly debating the direct deployment of ground troops into Ukraine, a move that threatens to escalate the proxy war into a full-scale European conflagration.

In recent days, military clashes between India and Pakistan have sharply escalated, with Indian forces carrying out strikes on targets in Kashmir and deep inside Pakistan on Wednesday. These developments threaten to trigger a full-scale war between the two nuclear-armed states, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the region and the world.

Behind the escalating conflict in South Asia lies the broader military buildup by US imperialism against China, with Taiwan as the central flashpoint. Joint military exercises with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, combined with expanded arms shipments to Taipei, are part of Washington's strategy to encircle China militarily.

The United States has increasingly threatened war with China over Taiwan not as a possibility but as an inevitability. James Stavridis, former NATO supreme allied commander, recently warned, "I never felt we were as close to an actual shooting war with Beijing as we are today."

The fascistic Trump administration, which has declared a global trade war on China as a central pillar of its agenda, is actively preparing for a "hot war" with the world's most populous country. China's gross domestic product has already surpassed that of the United States when measured by purchasing power parity, intensifying the strategic fears of the American ruling class.

Trump's plan to annex Canada, Greenland, the Panama Canal and Gaza as American territories must be understood within this context. These regions encompass strategic global trade chokepoints—the Panama Canal, the Red Sea and Gulf of Hormuz and the Northern Sea Route—and their seizure is part of a broader strategy to enforce American imperialist hegemony.

Eighty years after the exposure of the Nazi regime's crimes, the most horrific atrocities associated with fascism are being normalized once again. This is clear above all in the Gaza genocide, which is part of an escalating war throughout the region. The imperialist powers—having pledged to forge a "new Middle East" under their domination—are not only complicit in but are overseeing the genocidal campaign by the Israeli state against the Palestinian people.

According to official figures, more than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7, 2023, though the true death toll is likely nearing 100,000. Gaza has been systematically starved, with no food, water or fuel allowed to enter for over two months. At least 10,000 people are suffering from acute malnutrition.

Israeli TV producer Elad Barashi, associated with a right-wing broadcaster close to Netanyahu, called recently for the introduction of gas chambers and deportation trains in Gaza.

“Men, women, and children—by any means necessary, we must simply carry out a *Shoah* [Holocaust] against them.” Such calls for mass murder reveal openly the logic of the genocide itself.

The escalating global war is being spearheaded by American imperialism, now under the direction of Trump, but every imperialist power is rapidly rearming. Global military spending surged to \$2.7 trillion last year, the highest level ever recorded since figures began in 1988.

Among the largest percentage increases in military spending came from Germany and Japan. Germany’s military expenditure surged to \$88.5 billion in 2024, making it the fourth-largest in the world and the highest in Europe. This is a 28 percent increase from 2023 and an 89 percent increase since 2015.

The new German government, supported by all parties in parliament, is led by Friedrich Merz, who collaborated with the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) before the elections. It is now preparing to drive military spending to astronomical heights. A €500 billion special fund has been earmarked to make Germany’s infrastructure fit for war.

Japan increased its military spending by 21 percent in 2024, allocating the highest share of national expenditure to the military since 1958.

The feverish rearmament by the imperialist powers is being carried out under the banner of “national defense.” But behind this slogan lie the brutal interests of capitalist ruling classes confronting irreconcilable contradictions. On the eve of World War II, the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky explained in *War and the Fourth International*:

The same causes, inseparable from modern capitalism, that brought about the last imperialist war have now reached infinitely greater tension than in the middle of 1914. The fear of the consequences of a new war is the only factor that fetters the will of imperialism. But the efficacy of this brake is limited. The stress of inner contradictions pushes one country after another on the road to fascism, which, in its turn, cannot maintain power except by preparing international explosions. All governments fear war. But none of the governments has any freedom of choice. Without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable.

The contradictions of capitalism that gave rise to the Second World War were not resolved by the defeat of Nazi Germany. Though the post-war dominance of American imperialism temporarily suppressed direct conflict between the great powers, this unstable equilibrium began to unravel in the 1970s.

When large parts of the globe became accessible once again to capital with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the old

conflicts came to a head and have now assumed a new quality. These are the same contradictions that led to the two world wars.

As WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North explained in his contribution to this year’s May Day Rally:

The essential causes of the descent into political barbarism and catastrophic global warfare are the same economic and social contradictions of the capitalist regime that resulted in war and fascism in the last century. These interrelated contradictions are, first, the incompatibility of the world economy with the capitalist nation-state system; and, second, the socially destructive character of capitalist private ownership of the productive forces, controlled by money-mad oligarchs, and social production involving the labor of the billions of people that comprise the international working class.

Only the international working class, which creates all social wealth and has to bear the entire burden of war and crisis, is capable of preventing a new catastrophe.

Workers must counterpose the international unity of the working class to the growth of nationalism, war and trade war, which are also supported and promoted by the apparatus of the trade unions. They must reject the repulsive exploitation of the commemorations for the revival of militarism and the vile falsifications of history, and develop their own commemoration of the horrors of world war: It is capitalism that leads to barbarism, and only its overthrow by a mass movement of the working class for a world socialist republic can prevent this.

That is why building the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International is the most urgent task. Just as Trotsky warned of the Second World War on the basis of his Marxist understanding of the world situation, the ICFI is sounding the alarm today. And the warning remains the same: Without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable.



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