

European foreign ministers threaten sanctions, military build-up against Russia

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The foreign ministers of six European powers met Monday in London and issued a joint statement on the war with Russia in Ukraine and transatlantic relations. While hailing the NATO alliance with the United States as the “bedrock” of European “prosperity and security,” ministers of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom threatened Russia with new sanctions and a further European military build-up.

Despite the invocation of NATO as the “bedrock” of European prosperity, the reality is that the capitalist world order is undergoing a historic collapse. The US government, the leader of NATO, threatens to devastate Europe’s economy with tariffs on hundreds of billions of euros in exports to the US as it wages trade war on the world. Moreover, their policy of fighting Russia to the last Ukrainian has led to a military debacle for Europe. After millions of Ukrainian and Russian casualties, Ukraine is retreating all along the front.

The European powers are responding with a massive military build-up to develop Europe as a military bloc to wage imperialist wars independently of the US. The centerpiece of this effort is the €1 trillion plan to rearm Germany as an aggressive military power for the first time since the defeat of the Nazis in World War II. In every European country, however, this involves historic social attacks on the working class to fund a surge in military spending, and on democratic rights so Europe’s police states can suppress working class opposition.

This flows from the London summit statement which, while it calls for a “30-day ceasefire” in Ukraine, seeks to create the necessary framework to continue the present war. It calls to “strengthen Ukraine’s armed forces” and “restock munitions and equipment” amid the ongoing war with Russia. It also calls to prepare European “air, land and maritime reassurance forces” that would deploy to Ukraine to “support the regeneration of Ukraine’s armed forces.”

If Russia should fail to abide by the ceasefire Europe demands, the statement continues, Europe will drastically step up its economic strangulation of Russia. It calls for

“limiting Kremlin revenues, disrupting the shadow fleet [transporting Russian energy resources targeted by US and European sanctions], tightening the Oil Price Cap, and reducing our remaining imports of Russian energy.”

The statement concludes by advocating a European military build-up. It proposes to “further strengthen NATO and the contribution of European Allies by stepping up security and defence expenditure to meet the requirement to deter and defend across all domains in the Euro-Atlantic area.” This includes an “enhanced security and defence relationship between the UK and EU” in the post-Brexit era.

These policies, which threaten to provoke a direct war with Russia, a nuclear-armed state, are utterly reactionary. Government can only proceed with them in blatant violation of the will of the people. There is overwhelming popular opposition in Europe to plans to deploy European troops to Ukraine to face off against Russia, and to pension or other social cuts to fund the arms race.

The European powers’ demands for a “30-day ceasefire” from Russia is a political fraud, aiming to hide the aggressiveness of their own policy. Initially, they were aghast when the Trump administration opened talks with Moscow; Trump’s plan to loot \$500 billion in Ukrainian mining resources, as payback for US “aid” to Ukraine, conflicted with the European powers’ own plans to loot these resources.

European officials and media denounced a US ceasefire proposal when it was published last month, comparing it to the vindictive Versailles treaty that devastated Germany after World War I and calling to continue arming Ukraine against Russia. If the European powers are now rallying to the idea of a ceasefire, it is to position themselves for their own military build-up amid growing conflict with the Trump administration.

Monday’s London summit followed a trip to Kiev this weekend by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. The visit came as European and US diplomats discussed the possibility of

demanding a 30-day ceasefire from Russia. The visit's aim, the *Guardian* wrote, "was to put pressure on Trump to admit that Putin was stalling, and that the US had no political option but to put swingeing economic sanctions on Russia."

In Kiev, Starmer argued that Washington should rally to Europe's policy of confronting Russia. "So all of us here together with the US are calling Putin out. If he is serious about peace, then he has a chance to show it," he declared. "No more ifs and buts, no more conditions and delays."

Putin has responded with a proposal to hold negotiations in Istanbul, and Trump has pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to attend. However, the European powers are continuing to plan aggressive military action against Russia. German officials are insisting that they will maintain "strategic ambiguity" about plans to deliver Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine to launch long-range strikes on targets deep inside Russia.

As Britain pledges to increase its defense spending by £12 billion each year, and the EU adopts an €800 billion military spending increase, claims that the European powers have a peace policy do not hold water.

While the Russian capitalist regime invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the nature of the war and the dangers and tasks posed to the working class cannot be understood just by denouncing Putin's indubitably reactionary invasion. The most aggressive roles were played by the NATO imperialist powers. The strategic interests underlying their policy of arming Ukraine for war Russia in the run-up to the Russian invasion have now come to the surface.

At a summit last year in Switzerland, then-Polish President Andrzej Duda bluntly argued for destroying Russia, calling to carve it up into 200 statelets that Europe could dominate:

Russia is often called the prison of nations, and for a good reason. It is home to over 200 ethnic groups, most of whom became residents of Russia as a result of the methods used in Ukraine today. Russia remains the largest colonial empire in the world today, which unlike the European powers has never undergone the process of decolonization, and has never been able to deal with the demons of its past. There is no more space for colonialism in the modern world.

Today, amid an accelerating collapse of US world hegemony and sharpening US-European tensions, the European imperialist powers see military aggression and, in particular, the domination of nearby states like Russia as critical to staking their own bid for world hegemony. This

was explained bluntly in a column yesterday in the *Financial Times*, titled "Europe needs a new geopolitical compass," by Marc de Vos, the head of an influential Brussels think tank, the Itinera Institute.

De Vos laid out the various options for Europe's world policy. The first, he argued, was to develop as the hegemon in its region and ultimately the world, modeling Europe on the US world hegemony of the recent period. This would mean working to "project European power, tying third countries to a Pax Europeana built upon a big market with integrated technological and security capacities." Europe should "not only dominate its Eurasian theatre but an adversarial Russia."

Amid the growing US-China conflict, Europe's two other options, de Vos argued, were to orient either to China or America. One option is "positioning the EU as the last bastion of globalisation," continuing trade with China and thus "offering Beijing an off-ramp in its trade war with Washington on the condition of neutering its partnership with Moscow." Another is "to continue playing second fiddle to the US," by "striking a US-friendly trade deal with Trump, paying the bills for stability in Ukraine" and "toeing the US line on China."

Finally, he insisted, whatever option was pursued—including trying to pursue all these conflicting policies at once—European powers had to suppress their divisions by uniting around waging imperialist war abroad. "If Europe cannot become proactive and strategic, the geopolitical cross-currents will eventually divide it politically and marginalise it geopolitically," he wrote, adding: "European nations have to become conscious that the 'European project' is now a hard-power project that needs a geostrategic footprint beyond its current boundaries."

Such arguments must be taken as a warning: world capitalism, torn apart by mounting economic and military conflicts, is plunging into global war. This underlies not only the militarized and fascistic character of official politics, but also growing attacks on the working class, such as the 2023 French pension cuts that financed a massive rise in military spending. The decisive strategic task in this situation is unifying the working class across Europe, and internationally, in a socialist, anti-war movement.



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