

In German budget debate, Merz threatens Russia with war and declares himself leader of Europe

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The budget debate in the Bundestag (federal parliament) was a repulsive spectacle, clearly demonstrating the ruthlessness with which the Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) are implementing a reckless programme of rearmament and a return to German great-power politics—with the backing of virtually all parties.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) used his speech in the general debate to beat the war drums against Russia. He denounced the Russian government as a “criminal regime” that was “on its way to destroying the political freedom order of the entire European continent.” Merz declared: “The tools of diplomacy have been exhausted.”

That is a barely veiled declaration of war. First, the German government deliberately provoked Russia’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine, then systematically escalated the conflict and torpedoed any diplomatic solutions in order to use it today as a pretext to prepare for a comprehensive war against Russia. That is the purpose of the rearmament madness debated in the Bundestag over recent days.

The sheer figures alone show that this is not about defence, but about an aggressive war policy. In 2024, NATO defence budgets amounted to US \$1.5 trillion, constituting 55 percent of global military expenditure—10 times what Russia spends. Now, NATO has decreed that spending must rise to 5 percent of GDP by 2035. That would equate to roughly US\$2.5 trillion—17 times the Russian and eight times the Chinese military budgets.

Germany is not merely complying with NATO’s orders; it is the driving force behind this madness. While many countries will struggle to reach the 5 percent goal by 2035, Germany intends to hit 3.5 percent in pure military expenditure and 1.5 percent for additional war preparedness within three years. The current draft budget allocates €86 billion in total. The defence budget alone will increase by €10 billion. By 2029, the total is set to exceed €150

billion—surpassing Russia’s current military budget.

Germany, which in 2024 had the world’s fourth-largest defence expenditure, would, with these figures, have by far the largest NATO army in Europe. The combined current budgets of the nuclear powers France and the UK do not reach this level. These figures underpin Merz’s self-appointed role as Europe’s leader.

He declared in parliament: “I am taking on the leadership responsibility that in my understanding, a German chancellor must assume—one that Europe expects of us. Together with the foreign minister and defence minister, we have taken on such leadership responsibility within NATO.”

This utterly unhinged horror scenario of a Russian invasion that must allegedly be repelled under German leadership evokes the darkest chapters of German history. On December 11, 1941, Hitler legitimised war against America by invoking the same narrative:

“From month to month more, already in 1940, the realisation grew that the plans of the men in the Kremlin deliberately aimed at the domination and thus the destruction of all Europe,” proclaimed the Führer. Under such conditions, “Germany today is not fighting for itself, but for our entire continent. And it is a fortunate sign that that realisation is so deeply rooted in the unconscious of most European peoples that, whether through open declaration or through the influx of volunteers, they participate in this struggle.”

By then, Hitler had already occupied a large part of Europe and made it clear what was meant by German leadership in Europe. It was about the aggressive enforcement of German economic interests through terror. Four years later, Europe lay in ruins. The demand for German leadership in Europe brings back the worst memories of the greatest crimes in human history and is synonymous with fear and terror.

Today’s conflict concerns nothing other than economic interests. Germany aims to plunder Ukraine and subjugate Russia to secure vast resources and open up new markets.

The burden of these great-power politics is to be borne by the population once again. To pay for rearmament, the CDU and SPD plan substantial attacks on public services. “Yes, these are large sums that will hurt many,” Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) admitted in the Bundestag.

Some €5 billion is to be cut from the basic social benefit (Bürgergeld)—in a moment when hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs are being lost. Additionally, state funding for disability services is to be reduced by over 40 percent. Funding to promote social inclusion is to be cut from €523.7 million in 2024 to €410 million in 2025. Further cuts are planned in healthcare, pensions, long-term care insurance, public schools, refugee support and more. And this will not stop here. The entire budget rests on the assumption that the economy will grow thanks to massive tax gifts to the rich—an assumption made doubtful by US tariff threats.

There was not a single voice of criticism against Merz’s war rhetoric and great-power posturing in the Bundestag. The fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), set the tone for the government much like it does on refugee issues. Its defence spokesperson, retired Colonel Rüdiger Lucassen, demanded rearmament and compulsory military service, and supported the chancellor’s leadership fantasies:

“We want to end this era of self-belittling and lead not only ourselves, but the states of Europe into a safe and free future together—as sovereign nations, but someone must lead. I see no reason why Germany should not fill that role.”

He explained that he believed a Russian attack on Germany to be less likely than the chancellor but said it could not be ruled out. “Because that is so, and because the survival of our country may be at stake, readiness to defend ourselves is a basic imperative of political foresight and national self-assertion,” said the AfD spokesman.

The Greens differ little in their militaristic rhetoric from the AfD. When they criticise the government, it is only on the grounds that rearmament is not proceeding quickly enough. “What is needed is not lamenting the Trump administration, not whitewashing, not coalition squabbles—but a clear, action-backed message to the war criminals in the Kremlin: Do not dare to attack our democracy, our freedom—in Ukraine, in the Baltic states, and certainly not here in our country!” declared Agnieszka Brugger, deputy spokesperson for the Greens’ parliamentary group.

A particularly despicable role is played by Die Linke/Left Party. Its interim parliamentary leader Heidi Reichinnek vociferously criticised tax breaks for the rich and social cuts in her speech, but mentioned rearmament only briefly at the outset, calling it “playing with fire.” She made no mention of German great-power ambitions, war against Russia, or genocide in Gaza—which reveals the true extent of Berlin’s

willingness to inflict cruelty in pursuit of its economic interests.

The reason for this silence is that Die Linke shares the goals of German imperialism—it merely dresses them up with a few phrases about peace and diplomacy. That was made abundantly clear by its long-time parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch, who said:

“Whoever tells me now that we need to increase spending because we face a new security situation, I say: I know that.” With that, he echoed the official narrative. “But anyone who sees it differently is not automatically a Putinist or Kremlin supporter. No, it is undeniable that Russia is waging a terrible war of aggression. We say that too.”

He concluded by stating that rearmament must be thoroughly reviewed in committees: “I want to make it clear that we reject Budget Programme 14 in its current form. First, realistic analyses of threat scenarios are required. I hope that we will make progress in committee discussions, and I wish everyone well.”

His congratulations for implementing the greatest rearmament since Hitler is entirely in line with a party that already approved war credits exceeding €1 trillion—the basis of the current budget—which Die Linke approved in the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament).

The unanimity with which all the establishment parties support the insane war plans of the government shows that it is not merely the narrow-mindedness of politicians such as Merz and Pistorius that is leading towards war, but the deep crisis of capitalism. That is why all capitalist parties stand shoulder to shoulder in restoring German militarism. As it did 90 years ago, this accompanies xenophobia against refugees and the criminalisation of opponents of war.

Yet opposition to this madness is vast. The crucial factor is that this opposition must be organised and armed with a socialist perspective that opposes not only war but its root in capitalism. That is the programme of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its sister parties of the Fourth International.



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