

# Chancellor Merz plans to establish the “Tank Republic of Germany”

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In a detailed interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* last weekend, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democrats, CDU) outlined the ruling class’s programme of war and great-power politics. According to Merz, Germany must build “the strongest conventional army in Europe,” exceed NATO targets and prepare for a period in which “the law of the strongest” will once again apply. The era of a “rules-based order based on international law” is over, he said, adding that what matters now is “strength.”

These statements are nothing less than an open declaration for war and unrestrained rearmament. Merz called for Germany to once again become the dominant military power on the continent—if necessary, independently of Washington. Although he emphasised that he wants to maintain the nuclear alliance with the US, which grants Germany the ability to participate jointly with the US in firing nuclear weapons, he then explained that, due to growing transatlantic tensions, a joint European alliance with France on nuclear weapons could also be necessary in the future.

In the same breath, he did not explicitly rule out Germany’s own nuclear armament should nuclear cooperation with France not materialise. He merely stated that the time is not yet ripe for such a discussion and pointed out that at least two treaties—the Two Plus Four Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—actually “preclude” this path. When pressed by the *F.A.Z.* that “the largest country in the European Union will not be able to avoid an honest discussion on this issue at some point,” he replied: “The time is not ripe for that. My concern now is conventional defence.”

This statement is a warning: the federal government is first massively upgrading its conventional weapons and, when the time is “right,” will not shy away from nuclear armament. Provocative comments calling for a “German bomb” appear repeatedly in the mainstream media. In August, the *Handelsblatt* noted in an article headlined “Strange ... must we learn to love the bomb?": “The technology is not the problem. The decision for or against a European and, ultimately, German nuclear force is a political one.”

The openly declared goal of creating “Europe’s strongest conventional army” means Germany’s return to the role of an imperialist military power. The 2025 defense budget already

includes €62.43 billion from the regular budget and €24.06 billion from special funds—a total of €86.49 billion, more than ever before since the end of World War II. By 2029, the defence budget is set to rise to over €150 billion, which would correspond to around 3.5 percent of gross domestic product. In addition, around 1.5 percent is to be spent on war preparedness for infrastructure, bringing total war spending to 5 percent of GDP. That would be more than €215 billion and around 45 percent of the total federal budget for 2024.

The agreed rearmament, which was decided with the votes of the Left Party and the Greens, is comparable only to that undertaken by the Nazis on the eve of World War II. Ten thousand new military and 1,000 civilian jobs will be created, while billions will be poured into new weapons programs: 35 F-35 fighter jets, 60 CH-47 transport helicopters, several hundred new combat, infantry, and wheeled armored vehicles, warships, drone systems, missile and air defense systems, and even its own space command. Germany is thus on its way to becoming the largest military power in Europe and the third-largest arms manufacturer in the world after the US and China.

Parallel to military expansion, there is also economic expansion towards a war economy. Under the headline “Die Panzerrepublik” (The Tank Republic), the current issue of *Der Spiegel* describes the boom in the German arms industry. The report provides a shocking insight into the speed with which the entire economy is being converted to war production.

In Unterlüss, Lower Saxony, Rheinmetall has opened Europe’s largest ammunition factory—a plant that is expected to produce 350,000 shells annually by 2027. The company also builds rocket engines and is expanding into Spain, Hungary and Slovakia. Salzgitter AG is once again producing “armour steel,” which has not been available for decades, and is bundling its military activities under the brand name Salzgitter Defence.

The automotive supplier Schaeffler, the printing press company Heidelberg, the laser specialist Trumpf, and even car manufacturers such as VW and Porsche are entering the arms production business. *Der Spiegel* openly speaks of a new “arms industry miracle.”

The government is actively promoting this process. Public loans, EU funds, and energy subsidies are being diverted to

military purposes. Economic, industrial, and defence policies are merging into a single state project—a kind of *dirigiste* rearmament policy strongly reminiscent of the war economy of the 1930s. Then as now, state-financed arms contracts serve as an economic engine, and society is ideologically trimmed to be “combat capable.”

This development is not limited to the economy and the military. Merz speaks of a “blocked republic” that needs “fundamental changes.” The federal government is already working on reactivating military service. The chancellor’s language is that of an authoritarian state in transition to mobilization: the population must learn to make sacrifices; democracy must be “combative” and “take action against its opponents.”

The costs of rearmament are borne in every respect by the working class, as cannon fodder on the war fronts and in the form of historic social spending cuts. While the citizen’s benefit welfare payment is being cut and social budgets first frozen and then slashed, hundreds of billions are being poured into tanks, missiles and other war materiel.

The unions are being ideologically integrated—with appeals to “national responsibility” and “defence industry productivity.” The arms industry advertises “patriotism in the workplace” and attracts skilled workers with comparatively higher wages and comprehensive government contracts.

Schools and universities are being integrated into militarization—for example, through visits by youth officers and open advertising for the army. Propagandists in the bourgeois media defame criticism of armament and war as “unpatriotic” or “pro-Russian” and celebrate the resurrection of the German arms industry as a sign of economic strength and national self-assertion. The “tank republic” is glorified as a modern economic miracle, financed by government debt and social spending cuts.

What is emerging is a new military-industrial complex. Large corporations such as Rheinmetall, KNDS, Hensoldt, Diehl, and Airbus Defence are posting record profits, while small and medium-sized enterprises are following suit in droves: engine manufacturer Deutz supplies engines for howitzers, ZF Friedrichshafen builds tank transmissions, Renk supplies the European MGCS battle tank with drives, and hundreds of small and medium-sized mechanical engineering companies are converting their production to military components. Start-ups such as Arx Robotics and Helsing are developing AI systems, drones, and automated combat platforms, financed by NATO and federal programs.

The German Security and Defence Industry Association reports that the number of small and medium-sized enterprises involved in armaments has more than doubled since 2021. Investors are shifting capital into DefenceTech funds. By 2030, Germany and the EU will have invested over a trillion euros in the defence industry—a scale comparable only to the rearmament and war programs on the eve of the First and

Second World Wars.

The parallels with the war economy of the 1930s are particularly striking. Then, as now, the state provides contracts, directs capital, controls the workforce and justifies everything on the grounds of national “necessity.” Under the Nazi Four-Year Plan, industry, the financial system, and the labor market were placed completely at the service of war preparations. Today, this is happening under a nominally “democratic” façade, but with the same economic mechanisms: state control, monopoly formation, export offensives and ideological mobilization.

The thrust of German imperialism is also the same as under Hitler. Eighty years after the crimes of the Wehrmacht and the SS, the German ruling class is once again preparing a war of aggression in the East. Under the pretext of “defending democracy,” Berlin is once again pursuing the same great-power goals that have already led Europe to ruin twice: supremacy on the continent, control over Ukraine and all of Eastern Europe, and ultimately the subjugation of Russia.

Added to this is the pursuit of imperialist interests in other regions of the world through brute military force. Merz’s complaint that Europeans do not have “bunker-busting weapons” to stop Iran’s nuclear program, or the means to “disarm” Hamas, sums up the logic: a German-led Europe must be capable of military intervention and war to assert its geostrategic and economic interests.

As in the 1930s, the aim is to secure markets, raw materials and spheres of influence by force. The official justification is “peace and security,” but in reality, the same capitalist interests that brought about two world wars are driving the arms race today.

The course set by Merz and the federal government means war—both externally and internally. The working class can only stop it by organizing independently, fighting militarization and linking the struggle against war with the struggle against capitalism. The “tank republic of Germany” must not become a reality. It can only be stopped by a conscious socialist movement directed against war, militarism, and the entire capitalist system.



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