

European powers strive to prolong war in Ukraine

Peter Schwarz
11 December 2025

After four years of war, hundreds of thousands of soldiers killed and millions of refugees displaced, NATO's war against Russia has reached an impasse. Despite providing Ukraine with military logistics and €400 billion since the start of the conflict, NATO has failed to drive back Russian forces. They are advancing slowly but steadily.

The Ukrainian regime is collapsing under the weight of corruption scandals. President Zelensky was forced to dismiss his closest confidant, Andriy Yermak, and only 20 percent of the population would vote for him again. Several hundred soldiers are deserting the army each day. Despite brutal conscription methods, the Ukrainian military is unable to obtain the necessary cannon fodder for the front lines.

The US now appears determined to withdraw from the war. Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, has negotiated a "peace plan" with Russia—over the heads of both the Ukrainian government and Washington's European allies—that combines the cession of Ukrainian territory with lucrative deals for American corporate interests.

Trump's new National Security Strategy, released last week, no longer identifies Russia as an adversary but instead attacks the European Union (EU). It accuses European leaders of having "unrealistic expectations of the war," welcomes the rise of far-right parties in Europe as "a cause for great optimism" and calls for the breakup of the EU.

On Monday, Trump reinforced this stance in a lengthy interview with *Politico*, where he denounced Europe as a "decaying" group of nations led by "weak" people who don't know what to do. "They talk, but they don't accomplish anything, and the war just goes on and on," he railed.

The European powers—led by Germany, France and the UK—are responding by doing everything possible to prolong the bloodshed in Ukraine and block Trump's plans. They are not interested in peace, but the continuation of war. In recent days, there have been summit talks with Zelensky, phone calls to Trump, counterproposals to his "peace plan" and efforts to escalate military action.

The European powers aim to achieve two goals in particular. They want to prevent Ukraine from permanently ceding territories to Russia that it would not be able to reclaim later if the balance of power were to change. And they want so-called "security guarantees" for Ukraine. Even if the country renounces formal NATO membership, it is to be developed into a heavily armed

NATO outpost that keeps the region in a permanent state of tension and can reignite the war at any time.

French President Macron has long advocated for deploying French troops in Ukraine, and the British government has made similar pledges. Ukraine is also to be transformed into a hub of European arms production, and equipped with missiles capable of striking deep into Russia. The EU Commission and several member states have already earmarked enormous sums for this purpose.

Moscow cannot accept such "security guarantees" after fighting a four-year war to prevent NATO from expanding further and gaining a foothold in Ukraine. The guarantees demanded by Europe are aimed at sabotaging an agreement and ensuring that the war continues—with the support or at least acquiescence of the US.

However, it is unlikely that Washington will go along with Europe's maneuvers. Political observers now assume that the alliance with the US is irretrievably broken and that Europe will pursue its imperialist interests on its own in the future—and, if necessary, against the US.

This weekend's print edition of *Der Spiegel* appears with the title: "How Trump and Putin are attacking Europe: Two rogues, one goal." The cover story states:

As long as the cameras are rolling, European leaders dutifully praise Trump's mediation efforts. ... But as soon as the leaders are among themselves, they make no secret of the fact that they do not see Trump and his people as allies, but as rivals who have more sympathy for Vladimir Putin than for their former partners.

Der Spiegel concludes:

Europe will only be able to survive if it stands up to Russia and makes itself more independent from the US. ... The EU is not defenseless, even if it may appear that way at the moment. It just needs to be willing to use its power. It is home to more than 450 million people and, with a gross domestic product of €18 trillion, it is still the second strongest economic area behind the US. Europe has the money and technical know-how to build drones, tanks, and

fighter jets. ... Trump can only humiliate Europe if Europe makes itself small.

This is a program of unrestrained militarism. For four years, official propaganda has justified military support for Ukraine with the lie that it is about defending democracy and “Western values” against an arbitrary war of aggression, even though NATO deliberately provoked the war by expanding eastward.

But now that the war is at an impasse, the US is seeking an agreement with Moscow, Zelensky is turning out to be a corrupt oligarch and resistance to the senseless bloodshed is growing among the Ukrainian and European populations. *Der Spiegel* identifies the real motive: Europe should build “drones, tanks, and fighter jets” so that it does not “make itself small”—i.e., so that it can act as a major military power in a world of imperialist conflicts.

There are dozens of similar comments. The IPG Journal of the Social Democratic Party-affiliated Friedrich Ebert Foundation states:

The benevolent hegemon on the other side of the Atlantic is now becoming a world power that, like Russia, is attempting to weaken the EU and arrange the political conditions in Europe according to its own discretion. There is no sign of a compromise or middle ground.

In response, the IPG Journal calls for “a European Rütli Oath,” a reference to the supposed beginning of the Old Swiss Confederacy’s rebellion against the Hapsburgs in the 14th century. It says there is a need for “a forced reduction of Europe’s security policy dependencies, the establishment of a European arms industry for central systems that enable Europe to act jointly, a strengthening of economic and political relations with other regions,” and the consolidation of international institutions “against influence from Washington.”

And Stefan Meister of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) writes in *Die Zeit*, “Only a Europe capable of acting, which takes responsibility militarily, financially, and with regard to Ukraine’s integration into the EU, can become a player in negotiations to end the war.”

Europe’s insistence on “security guarantees” that are unacceptable to Russia, and its commitment to prolonging the war, not only deepen the suffering and destruction in Ukraine but risk dragging all of Europe into a catastrophic conflict with nuclear-armed Russia. These policies are inseparable from attacks on the working class. In its fight against the “rogue” Trump, the European bourgeoisie is adopting his fascist methods.

The demand for a continent-wide rearmament for preparation for war with Russia was spelled out by NATO head Mark Rutte—a former prime minister of the Netherlands—in a speech in Germany on Thursday.

He declared, “Conflict is at our door. Russia has brought war back to Europe, and we must be prepared for the scale of war our

grandparents or great-grandparents endured. Imagine it, a conflict reaching every home, every workplace, destruction, mass mobilisation, millions displaced, widespread suffering and extreme losses.”

He claimed that if the major NATO powers in Europe rearmed “to invest 5% of GDP annually in defence by 2035 military spending agreed by Nato that “this is a tragedy we can prevent.” But as is clear with the attempts of the Europeans to stymie any peace deal with Russia over Ukraine, none of this is aimed at peace. Rather Rutte’s speech was summed up in his statement that Nato “had to shift to a wartime mindset.”

The planned increase in military spending to 5 percent of GDP over the coming years is already leading to massive attacks on pensions, healthcare and social programs. In France, Macron’s pension reforms sparked mass protests; he remains in office only thanks to the support of the Social Democrats. In Belgium, Portugal and Italy, general strikes have erupted in response to austerity budgets. In Germany, disputes over pension reform—i.e., a major reduction in retirement benefits—are threatening the stability of the ruling coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and SPD.

But continuing the war without US support and integrating Ukraine into the EU will cost even more. Military aid to Ukraine has already fallen sharply this year because Europe has been unable to replace the missing payments from the US, which previously covered half of the costs.

Ukraine’s financial needs for the next two years are estimated at €136 billion. The EU wants to use the frozen Russian central bank assets held by Euroclear in Belgium to cover these costs. However, the Belgian government has so far strongly opposed this, fearing that it will be held liable for brazen theft that violates the principle of state immunity under international law.

Added to this are the effects of the global trade war. Industrial production in Germany, the strongest EU member in economic terms, is in free fall. Between the summer of 2024 and the summer of 2025, 114,000 relatively well-paid jobs were lost there within a year—almost 10,000 every month.

The European ruling class is preparing for a major escalation of class struggle. Like Trump, it is responding by stepping up persecution of migrants, building a police state, strengthening far-right parties and persecuting political opposition. Militarism and democracy are incompatible.

Workers must prepare for fierce class struggles. The defense of jobs, the fight against social spending cuts and the struggle against war and militarism are inseparably linked. They require the development of an independent movement of the international working class to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)