

European powers set course for escalation of war in Ukraine against Russia

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17 December 2025

The talks on a supposed “peace plan” for Ukraine, which took place in Berlin over the past few days, have made one thing clear above all else: the leading European powers—above all Germany—are doing everything they can to prolong NATO’s war against Russia and escalate it to a new, even more dangerous level.

While German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called the German capital a “hub of peace efforts,” in reality it hosted a war summit. Behind closed doors, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Trump’s negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, and a number of European heads of state and government haggled not over how to end the war, but how to continue it under new conditions.

The starting point for the Berlin talks is the deep crisis of the NATO war. After four years of bloody fighting, hundreds of thousands of casualties, and millions of refugees, NATO’s offensive has reached an impasse. Despite more than €400 billion in Western military and financial aid to Ukraine, Russian troops are advancing slowly but steadily. In Ukraine itself, the regime is crumbling under corruption scandals and the growing war weariness of the population.

The Trump administration is responding to this situation with a change of course. The new National Security Strategy no longer designates Russia as an adversary, but focuses on enforcing naked US interests worldwide and weakening the European Union. Washington is seeking a deal with Moscow that combines territorial concessions from Ukraine with lucrative economic agreements for American corporations.

This is precisely what the European powers are opposed to. They do not accuse the fascist Trump of being too aggressive toward Russia, but rather too lenient. Commentaries in *Der Spiegel*, FAZ, NZZ, the business press, and social democratic think tanks demand that Europe “emancipate” itself from the US, become an independent military superpower, and “stand up” to Russia. This is not a peaceful alternative to American imperialism, but a program of unrestrained European militarism and direct war against nuclear-armed Russia.

The “Berlin Declaration” adopted by European heads of state and government on Monday evening sums up this course. It provides for maintaining the Ukrainian army at a permanent level of 800,000 soldiers—“even in peacetime.” Ukraine, a country with a population of 30 to 35 million, is to maintain the largest military in Europe, heavily armed, highly equipped, and fully integrated into NATO structures.

At the same time, the European declaration and accompanying documents describe the tasks of a “multinational Ukraine force” under European leadership, “supported by the US.” This force is to assist the Ukrainian armed forces in “regeneration,” securing airspace, and “ensuring safe seas,” and will “operate within Ukraine.”

Europe is thus preparing to deploy its own ground troops in the Ukrainian war zone—something the Kremlin repeatedly describes as a red line, threatening in response military retaliation against NATO countries.

This is already being aggressively propagated in the German media. The chairman of the Defense Committee, Christian Democratic Union member

of parliament R  wekamp, has demanded that Germany participate in such a mission with “personnel and material.” Social Democratic parliamentary group leader Miersch has declared that “nothing is being ruled out.” The supposed “peace negotiations” in Berlin have thus served primarily to prepare for the deployment of European troops and a massive, long-term rearmament of Ukraine.

At the heart of Europe’s push are so-called “security guarantees” for Ukraine. Now that even Zelensky admits NATO membership is not feasible in the foreseeable future, a de facto substitute is to be created: a treaty that mimics Article 5 of the NATO Treaty—the obligation to provide assistance in the event of war—without explicitly linking it to formal NATO membership.

The Berlin Declaration speaks of a “legally binding obligation” to “take measures to restore peace and security” in the event of a future attack. The next sentence states that these measures could include military intervention, but also intelligence, logistical, economic or diplomatic support.

The backdoor is deliberately built in to give governments maximum flexibility. Politically, however, the message is clear: an attack on Ukraine—or a provocation that can be interpreted as such—should be considered an attack on Europe and responded to accordingly. Moscow attacked Ukraine, following constant Western provocations, to prevent a further expansion of NATO up to its borders. Berlin, Paris and London are now not only demanding an 800,000-strong Ukrainian army on Russia’s doorstep, but also a European force in Ukraine and alliance guarantees comparable to NATO membership.

The European powers are thus preparing something that is completely unacceptable from Russia’s point of view. The demands are deliberately worded in such a way as to sabotage any peace agreement and create a permanent war front in Eastern Europe.

The aggressiveness and recklessness with which Europe’s ruling class is pushing for escalation was demonstrated by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in Berlin over the weekend. In a speech during the Ukraine consultations, he declared that Europe had to prepare for a war like the one fought by “our grandfathers and great-grandfathers”—that is, a general, protracted and extremely costly continental war that inevitably carries with it the danger of an all-consuming Third World War. Rutte said:

We must be ready, because at the end of this first quarter of the 21st century, conflicts will no longer be fought from afar. The conflict is on our doorstep. Russia has brought war back to Europe, and we must be prepared for a level of war that our grandparents or great-grandparents experienced. Imagine: a conflict that reaches every home, every workplace, destruction, mass mobilisation, millions of displaced people, widespread suffering, and extreme losses.

At the same time, the militarisation of the entire EU is in full swing. Under the title “Defense Readiness 2030,” the European Council has adopted a five-year plan that is a blueprint for a European war economy and the militarisation of the entire continent.

Germany is at the forefront of this drive. The recently adopted 2026 war budget reached a historic record level of over €108 billion, and is set to rise to over €150 billion by 2029. In fact, German imperialism already spends around five percent of GDP on war-related expenditures. Merz has announced that Germany will build the “strongest conventional army in Europe.”

In his government statement yesterday, Merz underscored Germany’s claim to European supremacy. He declared that the federal government and he personally were “firmly determined that Germany must not become a victim, not an object” of the “epochal change” currently taking place.

He continued:

We must not stand by and watch as the world is reorganised. We are not a plaything of the great powers... We want to and must remain an active player that stands up for its interests and values with determination and assertiveness.

In other words, as on the eve of World War II, Germany is preparing to organise Europe in order to assert its economic and geostrategic interests globally against its adversaries. In addition to Russia and China, this includes the United States of America.

The German-European escalation of war is taking place against the backdrop of a deep rift in the transatlantic alliance. Trump’s National Security Strategy attacks the European Union head-on, promoting the rise of right-wing extremist parties and announcing that the US will in the future concentrate its resources primarily in Latin America and the Indo-Pacific region. Russia is no longer designated as the main adversary. Instead, Europe should find “strategic stability” with Moscow while Washington pursues its own interests.

The reaction of the European ruling class is clear and belligerent. The warmongers in politics and the media are calling for a kind of “European Rütli Oath,” a reference to the supposed beginning of the Swiss rebellion against the Hapsburgs in the 14th century: the establishment of an independent arms industry, the reduction of security dependence on the US, the strengthening of “patriotic” forces, and the aggressive expansion of European influence in the East.

In other words, the split in NATO is not leading to a departure from militarism, but to a bitter struggle between rival imperialist blocs seeking to secure their global position by military means.

This development finds stark expression in Ukraine. Trump and his emissaries view the country as a commodity, an object for deals with Putin and future special economic zones. The Europeans, in turn, are trying to bring Ukraine under their control as a permanent front line and staging state—militarily, politically and economically.

The issue of frozen Russian central bank assets—around €210 billion, most of which is held by Euroclear in Brussels—plays a key role in this. Both the Berlin Declaration and the preparations for the EU summit beginning today aim to convert this money into a “reparation loan” and use it to finance the war and reconstruction. This is, under international law, an unprecedented act of robbery, and, according to statements by the Kremlin, will meet with “far-reaching consequences.”

At the same time, German corporations are preparing to reap huge profits from the destruction of Ukraine. The German government is organising investor conferences and delegation trips, while arms and construction companies are planning factories and infrastructure projects

in the country. Ukraine is becoming a testing ground for new weapons systems, digital warfare and a hyper-exploited low-wage economy.

This is the real content of the grandiose speeches about “reconstruction” and “European responsibility:” it is about raw materials, sales markets, profits, and the imperialist redivision of Eastern Europe. Official propaganda cannot hide the fact that this is a third attempt by German imperialism to seize control of Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

Already in World War I, control over Ukraine, rich in raw materials and geostrategically central, was one of the declared war aims of the German Empire, alongside the establishment of German hegemony over “Central Europe.” In World War II, Hitler continued this policy. The conquest of Ukraine played a central role in the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, which led to the Holocaust and cost the lives of at least 27 million Soviet citizens.

Today, German imperialism is once again pursuing the goal of removing Ukraine and other states that were once part of the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire from Moscow’s sphere of influence and bringing them under the control of the German-dominated European Union.

The enormous sums spent on armament, warfare and “defence readiness” are squeezed directly out of the social gains of the working class. Across Europe, pensions are being cut, health care systems ruined and public services destroyed to finance tanks, fighter jets, missiles and drones. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs are being eliminated, while billions flow into the pockets of arms company shareholders.

As in the 1930s, rearmament goes hand in hand with the systematic destruction of democratic rights. The repression of opponents of war and the Gaza genocide, the incitement against migrants, the expansion of the police state, and the systematic elevation of fascist forces are expressions of the same development: the ruling class is preparing not only for war abroad, but also for civil war against the working class.

The preparation for a third world war, which would be fought with nuclear weapons and destroy civilisation itself, is the ultimate expression of the historical crisis of capitalism. But the same contradictions that are driving imperialism toward war are driving the class struggle forward worldwide. Strikes and mass demonstrations in France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and other countries against austerity and militarism herald what is to come.

However, spontaneous resistance is not enough. The working class cannot support either American or European imperialism. It must not align itself with any of the rival cliques of great powers, all of which are prepared to plunge millions into ruin to defend their profits and geopolitical influence.

The Putin regime, which emerged from the restoration of capitalism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, plays a reactionary role. It relies on war, militarism and dictatorship to defend the interests of the Russian oligarchy. Under pressure from imperialism, it vacillates between military threats, including the use of nuclear weapons, and submissive begging for a deal.

What is needed is the building of an international socialist anti-war movement that links the struggle against war and dictatorship with the struggle against the capitalist system. This means:

- The formation of independent rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods.
- The international coordination of the struggle against social cuts, militarism and repression.
- The conscious building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class—the Socialist Equality parties as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Only when the working class takes power and reorganises the economy on the basis of socialist planning can the enormous resources currently being poured into war and destruction be used to meet human needs and

prevent the catastrophe of a third world war.



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