

The eruption of American imperialism reaches Europe: The conflict over Greenland and the fight against imperialist war

Johannes Stern
19 January 2026

“U.S. capitalism is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of ‘organizing Europe.’ The United States must ‘organize’ the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.”

More than 90 years after Leon Trotsky issued this warning, the “volcanic eruption” of American imperialism he described has entered a new and especially explosive phase. One year after the renewed installation of Donald Trump as president, the aggressive foreign and military policy of the United States is escalating not only against dependent countries and declared adversaries but increasingly against its own imperialist allies in Europe.

The year began with the illegal attack on Venezuela and the abduction of its president, Nicolás Maduro, followed by open threats to bomb Iran in order to impose a US-backed regime. Now this policy is being directed openly against Europe. Over the weekend, Trump reiterated his supposed claims to ownership of Greenland and threatened European governments that oppose his plans with massive trade sanctions and military consequences. “The world is not safe until we have complete and total control over Greenland,” he wrote in a letter addressed to the Norwegian prime minister. At the same time, he made clear his willingness to resort to military force, cynically stating that he no longer felt obliged “to think only about peace.”

The dispute over Greenland is not just another mad outburst by an erratic president but an expression of the strategic interests of US imperialism. The Arctic has become a central arena of global rivalry, due to its natural resources, emerging shipping routes and immense military significance. Washington views control over Greenland as essential to securing its dominance in the North Atlantic and countering both China and Russia. That the sovereignty of Denmark and the interests of European allies are being brushed aside demonstrates how far the disintegration of the postwar transatlantic order has already advanced.

As in the United States itself and around the world, Trump’s

actions have provoked widespread anger and opposition among the European population. But workers and young people must not succumb to the illusion that the European governments represent a progressive or peaceful alternative. The ruling classes in Berlin, Paris and Brussels are responding to US threats not by mobilizing against the fascist in the White House and imperialist war but by adopting their own aggressive measures and openly preparing for economic and military confrontation.

A spokesperson for the European Commission confirmed that as early as February, special EU tariffs on imports worth €93 billion could come into force. These measures are part of a comprehensive package prepared last year and designed to be activated automatically if required. The president of the European Council, Antonio Costa, has announced a special summit to discuss further steps. Leading politicians are openly speaking of retaliation and escalation. The chairman of the European People’s Party Manfred Weber declared that Europe is “not powerless,” boasted of freezing trade agreements and threatened the use of the so-called Anti-Coercion Instrument—a “trade bazooka” that would allow the EU to exclude US corporations from public contracts, suspend payments and impose sweeping economic countermeasures.

In bourgeois think tanks, scenarios involving even war between the United States and Europe are now being openly discussed. “We either fight a trade war, or we’re in a real war,” said Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, a senior fellow at Bruegel, a research institute in Brussels. Such statements underscore that the conflict is not limited to economic disputes, but the fight between the imperialist powers over resources and spheres of influence is exploding NATO and the entire postwar system and erupting into open trade war and ultimately war.

The hypocritical invocations by European governments of international law, human rights and a “rules-based international order” deserve nothing but contempt. Over the past three decades, they have supported every US-led war of aggression—from Kosovo to Afghanistan and Iraq and Libya. Only days ago, they aligned themselves with US aggression against Venezuela and Iran. They are complicit in the genocide

against the Palestinians, which has reduced Gaza to rubble and killed tens of thousands, overwhelmingly women and children.

In the war against Russia in Ukraine, the European powers now play the most aggressive role. This war was deliberately provoked through NATO's systematic encirclement of Russia and is being exploited to militarize Europe and prepare for a direct confrontation with the nuclear-armed state. In the conflict with Russia, the major European powers even criticise Trump for being too "soft," as they fear that Washington may strike a deal with Moscow that sidelines European interests, particularly access to raw materials.

In this situation, the Greens and the Left Party are among the most reactionary forces. They openly support the militarization of Greenland and demand tougher action from Berlin and Brussels. Leading figures welcomed the deployment of German troops to the region, while insisting that it does not go far enough. Under the banner of "solidarity with Greenland," they promote an aggressive European/German world-power policy. Calls for German consulates, military presence and a stronger EU role reveal that these parties are fully integrated into the state apparatus and function as the ideological shock troops for rearmament. Their vision of a "fourth world power Europe" is nothing more than a program of imperialist rivalry and war preparation.

Put plainly: Workers and young people in Europe are confronted not only with the "volcanic eruption" of American imperialism but also with that of European imperialism. Even a trade war would have devastating consequences for workers in Europe and the United States, leading to mass unemployment and poverty on a scale comparable to the Great Depression, not to mention the danger of such a conflict escalating into a hot war, threatening the lives of millions.

The scale of the rearmament plans of the European powers recalls the years preceding the First and Second World Wars. German imperialism, in particular, is once again openly reviving its great-power traditions and pursuing the goal of militarily leading the continent in order to assert its interests against Russia, against the United States and globally.

This development was anticipated long ago by the Trotskyist movement. As early as 1991, the International Committee of the Fourth International's "Manifesto Against Imperialist War and Colonialism" warned that the attack on Iraq would not only inaugurate a new era of neocolonial wars but also intensify conflicts among the imperialist powers themselves—above all, the historic antagonism between the United States and Germany, which had confronted each other in two world wars during the 20th century.

The European ... imperialists do not intend to leave their fate in the hands of the United States. In the aftermath of the war [against Iraq], the Europeans have taken steps to establish their own "rapid deployment

force" independently of the NATO structure, in which the United States still plays the leading role. The German ruling class has made it clear that it cannot accept that its position in world affairs in the twenty-first century should be determined by the military defeat it suffered in the middle of the twentieth.

Today, the point of open confrontation has been reached. But at the same time, another fundamental analysis of the ICFI is being confirmed. The same contradictions of the capitalist system that inexorably drive society toward war—the contradiction between the global economy and the nation-state system, and between the social character of production and its private appropriation—also create the objective basis for social revolution.

In the United States itself, resistance to Trump's fascistic policies is growing rapidly. In New York, the center of global finance capital, 15,000 nurses are participating in the largest healthcare strike in the city's history. In Minneapolis, workers are preparing for a general strike following the killing of Renee Nicole Good by the immigration police, ICE. Across the country, protests and strikes are intensifying as the ruling oligarchy and the state apparatus become ever more authoritarian and fascist.

It is to the global working class that workers and young people in Europe must orient themselves. Their allies are not the governments in Berlin, Paris, London or Brussels, not the EU's rearmament programs, and not the pseudo-left parties that dress up European militarism in "progressive" rhetoric. Their natural allies are the workers in the United States and around the world, who confront the same development of war, austerity and dictatorship.

The answer to Trump's fascistic policy of "might makes right" is not European rearmament but the international mobilization of the working class against all of the imperialist warmongers. The only progressive perspective lies in the overthrow of the capitalist system that gives rise to war and the construction of an international socialist society. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, are fighting for this program in the US, in Europe and throughout the world.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact