

Merz in Davos: A call for European great-power politics under German leadership

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The speech by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos was an aggressive tirade in favor of European great-power politics under German leadership. Barely concealed, Merz presented a program of militarism, rearmament and economic nationalism that stands squarely in the tradition of German world-power fantasies on the eve of the First and Second World Wars.

Merz framed his entire speech around the leitmotif of a new era of "great power rivalry." The world, according to the chancellor, is shaped by Russia's invasion of Ukraine—an invasion that was in reality provoked by NATO's anti-Russian encirclement—by the rise of China, and by the United States, whose "global pole position is being challenged and Washington reacts by radically reshaping its foreign and security policy."

This formulation is a deliberate whitewashing of the increasingly violent rampage of US imperialism, which is attempting to offset its historic economic decline through ever more brutal force. At the beginning of this year alone, Washington attacked Venezuela and abducted its elected president, Nicolás Maduro. This was followed by open threats of a military strike against Iran and the announcement of plans to bring Greenland under US control.

At the same time, the chancellor made clear that the ruling class is fully aware of the consequences of its policies. At a key point in his speech, Merz declared: "A world where only power counts is a dangerous place. First for small states, then for the middle powers, and ultimately for the great ones." He continued: "In the 20th century, my country Germany went down this road to its bitter end. It pulled the world into a black abyss."

Yet this "abyss" of world war and barbaric crimes does not deter the ruling class from once again going "down this road." On the contrary, Merz's entire speech made clear that Germany, above all, is responding to the historic

crisis of capitalism and the violent breakdown of the international order with an aggressive offensive of rearmament and war preparation.

"This new world of great powers is being built on power, on strength and when it comes to it, on force. It is not a cozy place," Merz declared. But, he continued, "We do not have to accept this new reality as fate. We are not at the mercy of this new world order"—by which he meant nothing other than a conscious decision in favor of militarization and preparations for war.

Particularly revealing in this context was Merz's explicit praise for Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who had previously declared in Davos: "We must no longer rely only on the power of our values. We must also recognize the value of our power." Merz responded unequivocally: "I share that view." He then spelled out what this means in concrete terms.

With regard to Greenland, Merz emphasized that Germany and Europe are prepared to assert their interests aggressively in the future—not only against Russia, but also against the United States. While praising Donald Trump's temporary retreat from a direct annexation, he added pointedly: "Any threat to acquire European territory by force would be unacceptable." He issued a similar warning over possible US tariffs: "If they are put in place, Europe's answer would be united, calm, measured, and firm."

This language reflects a certain tactical restraint. As long as Europe needs time for massive rearmament and remains dependent on US support in NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, Merz is seeking to avoid an open confrontation with Washington. But he leaves no doubt about the strategic objective: the transformation of Europe into an independent military great power under German leadership.

"In the new age of great powers, Europe must stand together resolutely and sovereignly," Merz declared. At

last year's NATO summit in The Hague, the material prerequisites for this course had already been created. "Europe will invest hundreds of billions of euros in its security." Germany itself, he stressed, is "massively investing in our own security" while working to improve "the competitiveness of our economies."

Merz then articulated the German-European version of Donald Trump's fascistic "Make America Great Again" policy. He stated:

First, Germany has to regain economic strength. Second, we want to make Europe a key player again—in global politics, economically and particularly in defence. We need to be able to defend ourselves—and we need to do so fast.

These goals are complementary. Economic competitiveness and the ability to shape global politics are two sides of the same coin. Germany can only lead the way in Europe if we are economically strong. And Europe's geopolitical influence and our defence capability largely depend on the continent's economic momentum.

Translated into reality, this means that the working class is expected to pay in every respect for Germany's great-power ambitions—Europe's bid to lead the world. As cannon fodder on the battlefields, through social cuts, wage suppression, and the destruction of democratic rights. This is what Merz means by "economic competitiveness" and "momentum."

Merz boasted that the government had decided right at the start of his term in office "to increase Germany's defence spending up to five percent of GDP." Such an increase represents a massive transfer of social resources into the military, the arms industry and the security apparatus—at the expense of education, health care and social services. The scale of rearmament and war preparation is comparable only to the unleashing of German militarism on the eve of the two world wars. "Boosting our military capabilities means to assert our sovereignty," Merz declared bluntly.

How far these plans actually extend is underscored by the current cover story of *Der Spiegel* titled "Donald, enough: What Europe must do to counter Trump's hunger for power." It openly discusses modern combat aircraft, European credit-card and AI corporations, and even a "credible common nuclear deterrent."

The magazine also openly acknowledges that the breakdown of the transatlantic alliance is intensifying tensions among the European imperialist powers themselves. *Der Spiegel* reports on resistance in France to German participation in French nuclear weapons and concludes that there is "only one real alternative: A coalition of the willing under German leadership builds its own nuclear force and thereby protects the continent."

While the authors note that Germany is bound by international treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Two-Plus-Four Agreement to remain non-nuclear, and that German nuclear armament would trigger a nuclear arms spiral, they provocatively add that "inaction" would make Europe "vulnerable to blackmail." In other words: once A is said, B must follow—ultimately, there is no alternative to the German bomb.

This aggressive course of German-European world-power politics, without any taboos, is supported not only by the governing parties CDU/CSU and SPD and the fascist AfD, but also by parliamentary parties that present themselves as "left" or "progressive." Left Party leader Jan van Aken called for "determined resistance" by Europe following Trump's threats and demanded joint EU consulates in Greenland. Green Party chair Felix Banaszak demanded a "very robust response" from Merz and declared that "the time of self-diminishment must be over." These parties stand fully on the ground of German-European great-power politics.

Merz's speech in Davos confirms what the *World Socialist Web Site* has long analyzed—and what the political leaders of the ruling oligarchy are now more or less openly stating themselves: the capitalist world system has entered a new phase of explosive crisis. The return of open great-power rivalry is inseparably bound up with militarism, authoritarianism and social devastation.

There is only one way to stop this madness: the international unification of the working class—in Europe, in the United States and worldwide—on the basis of a revolutionary socialist perspective. It is for this perspective that the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting.



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