

Europe's imperialist powers line up behind regime change in Iran

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2 February 2026

As would-be dictator Donald Trump menaces Iran with a major build-up of US military capabilities in the Middle East, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared last week that “the days of the Iranian regime are numbered” and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer asserted that his government “supports the goal” pursued by the US President. The European imperialist powers are fully complicit in preparing an imperialist war of plunder against the most populated country in the region.

The threat of a war launched by the imperialist powers against Iran, a former colonial country, is very high. The US has an aircraft carrier strike group positioned in the Middle East with more vessels on the way. Speaking in Tehran Sunday, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, warned, “They should know that if they start a war this time, it will be a regional war.”

Bolstering Trump's war threats, the European Union (EU) decided last Thursday to place Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) on its “terror list” alongside Al-Qaida, Hamas and Islamic State. The imperialist double standards are jaw-dropping, given that Berlin, Paris and Brussels have lauded the new Syrian leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, a former Al-Qaida leader who currently heads an authoritarian regime waging brutal military campaigns against the country's Kurdish and Alawite minorities.

The question of who and what are defined as “terrorists” corresponds entirely to the aggressive ambitions of the imperialist powers. They hope through Al-Sharaa to open up Syria to European and US capital, while sidelining Iran and Russia. In the case of Iran, the European powers and Washington are pursuing the installation of a pro-Western puppet regime to facilitate the exploitation of the country's energy reserves, guarantee the security of shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz and strengthen imperialist hegemony over the broader Middle East region.

Backed by the European powers, Washington has been trying for years to topple the bourgeois-clerical regime in Tehran through punitive economic sanctions, and covert and overt military operations. When Trump unilaterally abrogated the nuclear accord with Iran in 2018, ending sanctions relief and plunging millions into bitter poverty, the European powers collaborated with Washington. While publicly pledging their intent to maintain trading relations with Iran, including by creating a mechanism independent of US control to facilitate this, in practice the European powers refused to trade with Tehran for fear of disrupting the economic access of major European corporations to

the US market.

The European imperialists gave unflinching support to Israel's genocide of the Palestinians, which they and their American counterparts viewed as a step towards regime change in Tehran by destroying its regional allies. The devastation of Hamas in Gaza from October 2023 and Hezbollah in Lebanon during a months-long bombardment in 2024, as well as the repeated strikes on the Houthis in Yemen, isolated Tehran. While Israel's military operations were dependent most of all on the supply of American weaponry, the European powers contributed mightily to the slaughter. Germany was the second-largest source of Israel's arms imports after the US, and all European governments systematically repressed anti-genocide protests at home.

This bloody record has not stopped the representatives of European imperialism from attempting to cloak their predatory ambitions in the most “humanitarian” garb. If one took the statements of EU officials and foreign ministers from national governments across the continent at face value, the decision to sanction the IRGC was taken due to their outrage over the mass repression of protesters in Iran, which the Tehran regime has admitted led to some 3,000 deaths.

EU Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas intoned, “When the atrocities were clear, then it was also clear that there has to be a very strong response from the European side,” while French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot asserted that Paris was persuaded by the “unwavering courage of the Iranians, who have been the target of this violence.”

These spokesmen for imperialism must take the population for fools. The European powers have not so much as batted an eyelid as their provocative warmongering against Russia helped instigate and fuel a conflict that has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainians in the “meat grinder” of eastern Ukraine. A study published last week estimated total casualties from the war at 2 million. For Brussels, Berlin and Paris, these “sacrifices” are justified when it is a matter of ensuring that their banks and major corporations secure their pound of flesh by plundering Ukrainian and Russian natural resources and cheap labour after the fighting stops. As French President Emmanuel Macron put it in a message to Trump, which the US President subsequently made public, the European powers and American imperialism can “do great things on Iran.”

The mounting rivalry between the European imperialists and their erstwhile American imperialist ally is one of the factors

driving Europe's aggressive push to escalate the war with Russia and promote war with Iran. Trump's attempt to exclude the Europeans from a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised fears among the European ruling class that, after investing so much in the war, they could be cut out of the profits if US capital obtains preferred access to the region. The sharp divergence in Transatlantic relations was on full display throughout January over the question of who will control Greenland, an island with substantial raw materials for exploitation and a critical geostrategic and economic location in the Arctic.

The same applies to Iran. The European powers are ever more dependent on the US for their energy supplies. After all but abandoning cheap Russian gas imports following the outbreak of the Ukraine war, American liquified natural gas (LNG) imports rose almost four-fold between 2021 and 2025, and now account for some 57 percent of the continent's LNG imports. America now supplies about 27 percent of all natural gas imports, with analysts projecting that this could rise to a majority by 2030. Should the US carry out a regime change operation in Tehran without European participation, the continent's dependence on Washington and US oligarchs for critical energy supplies could become even greater.

What is rapidly developing is a new redivision of the world, in which the imperialist powers scramble to gain the upper hand against their rivals for control of raw materials, markets and cheap labour in every corner of the globe. As in the 20th century, the process is leading towards world war unless the international working class intervenes on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme to put an end to crisis-ridden capitalism, the source of imperialist war. As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained in its 1991 statement "Oppose imperialist war and colonialism,"

Not since the end of World War II has there been such uncertainty in international relations. The predictable channels through which international diplomacy flowed during the Cold War have been superseded by events. Old alliances are breaking down; and new ones are still in the process of formation. The struggle of the powerful transnational corporations for world domination imparts a terrific tension to international affairs...The alignment of "friends" and "enemies" may yet take a quite unexpected form. But imperialism being what it is, the clash of interests leads inevitably toward war. To believe that the imperialists will avoid such a drastic outcome because the results, given the existing technology, would be too terrible, would be a fatal political error. The fear of catastrophe does, indeed, exert some influence on the conduct of international relations. In their saner moments, the leaders of world imperialism probably realize that World War III could be the tomb of civilization. But historical experience testifies eloquently to the fact that it is the objective contradictions of imperialism, not the moral qualms or subjective fears of capitalist politicians, that decide the issue. The only force in the world that can prevent another world war is the revolutionary working

class.

Processes that were predicted over 35 years ago in this statement are now out in the open. Economic and geopolitical conflicts have erupted between Washington and Europe, and among the European imperialists themselves. While Trump bases his "America first" policy on dominating the Western hemisphere at the exclusion of all "non-hemispheric competitors" under the "Donroe doctrine," the European imperialists are striving for bilateral "free trade" agreements around the world, which are in reality agreements to secure preferential access to new markets at the expense of their rivals. The EU's recent agreement with India, for example, opens up the prospect of the continent's car companies and industrial manufacturers finding a new export market for their products under conditions in which US sales have declined sharply due to Trump's tariffs. But the criss-crossing of the world with competing trade arrangements and the division of the globe into competing blocks, far from producing an equilibrium, accelerates the slide, as the 1930s demonstrated, towards world war.

Leading European politicians, like German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Manfred Weber, the leader of the European People's Party, the largest party in the European Parliament, have openly called in recent days for the European imperialists to establish their own "nuclear deterrent" because the US is no longer a European ally. In a speech last week, Merz, invoking the spirit of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, declared that German imperialism must once again "learn to speak the language of power politics" in order to deal with the "harsh wind" of a "world of great powers." These policies entail a frontal assault on the European working class to take back all of the concessions the ruling elites were forced to make in the post-war period, a process which is already well underway.

Workers in Europe must oppose the looming war against Iran and the resurgence of inter-imperialist antagonisms by building an anti-war movement with American workers in struggle against capitalist exploitation and barbarism. The ruling elites on both sides of the Atlantic want the working class to bear the exploding costs for militarism and war budgets through the destruction of worker rights, mass layoffs and the expansion of precarious, low-paid jobs and public spending austerity. The working-class response must link the defence of jobs and social rights with opposition to all imperialist wars of plunder. Workers have no interest in lining up behind one gang of imperialist exploiters against another, but must forge international class unity on the basis of a revolutionary socialist programme.



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