

Merz in the Gulf region: Alliance with murderers, dictators in the name of German great power politics

Johannes Stern
7 February 2026

To justify its own rearmament and its push toward a new German great power policy, politicians and leading media outlets regularly claim that Berlin—unlike the United States under Trump, Russia or China—stands for freedom, democracy and human rights. If any further proof were needed that this portrayal is nothing but propaganda, it was provided by Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s trip to the Gulf monarchies of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—above all, his two-and-a-half-hour personal meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

To describe bin Salman as “reactionary” would be a gross understatement. He is not a defender of human rights but a dismemberer of human beings. The Saudi crown prince was directly involved in the bestial murder of journalist and regime critic Jamal Khashoggi. On October 2, 2018, Khashoggi was lured to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to collect documents for his upcoming wedding. He never left the building.

The details of his martyrdom have been known for years. Shortly after his disappearance, the Turkish government declared that it possessed audio and video recordings proving that Khashoggi was interrogated, tortured and then murdered inside the consulate. The recordings reportedly capture how he was dismembered while still alive and his body later dissolved in acid.

All of this is as well known to the German government as it is to the other imperialist powers, which—after a brief phase of feigned distance—have long since returned en masse to Riyadh. In February 2021, even the US government published an intelligence report stating that Mohammed bin Salman had personally “approved” the murder. The perpetrators came from his closest inner circle.

The murder of Khashoggi is merely the most prominent case within a system of state terror. Every year, there are numerous other “Khashoggis” who fall victim to the violence of the Saudi regime. “In 2024, more executions were carried out in Saudi Arabia than ever before,” Amnesty International declared. People were “sentenced to death for a wide range of offenses and under circumstances that violate international law and international standards.”

This trend continued in 2025. In the first half of the year alone, more than 180 people were executed, mostly for drug-related offenses, Amnesty’s Middle East expert Katja Müller-Fahlbusch told *Der Tagesspiegel*. Regime critics who are not murdered disappear into torture prisons. Activists campaigning for democratic rights are sentenced after grossly unfair trials to decades in prison or placed under strict house arrest.

Conditions in the other Gulf monarchies are scarcely better. The United Arab Emirates brutally suppresses all opposition and actively contributes to one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of our time through arms deliveries to Sudan’s RSF militia. Saudi Arabia, for its part, supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), further fueling the civil war. Added to this is Riyadh’s devastating role in Yemen.

If, alongside the genocide in Gaza and the war in Sudan, there has been another conflict in recent years with genocidal characteristics, it was the Saudi-led war against Yemen. Hundreds of thousands of people died from bombardments, starvation and the collapse of medical care. As early as 2021, the United Nations Development Programme estimated the death toll to be at least 377,000.

None of this prevented Merz from praising relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE in the highest terms. In Riyadh, he declared that the “economic, cultural, and social modernization of Saudi Arabia” made the country an “attractive market for German industry.” The Saudi sovereign wealth fund was also invested “to a considerable extent” in Germany—a potential that one wanted to “use for growth in Germany.”

In other words, when it comes to the interests of German capitalism and imperialism, human rights are simply thrown overboard. Merz traveled with a large business delegation and formulated three “guiding principles”: the “establishment of a strategic partnership,” the “strengthening of bilateral relations” and joint efforts for “peace and stability” in the region.

This “strategic partnership” includes not only extensive arms exports but, above all, access to energy and raw material sources. The Gulf states, with their enormous oil and gas reserves, play a key role in Berlin’s great-power plans. “We need such partnerships more than ever at a time when major powers increasingly determine global politics,” Merz stated openly.

Germany has already been importing liquefied natural gas from Qatar for years, which contributes to a “reliable energy supply.” German corporations are doing “good business” there, while the emirate holds stakes in numerous German companies. The Qatari emir is scheduled to visit Germany on a state visit in July to further deepen cooperation. In Abu Dhabi, Merz finally declared that Berlin was prepared to expand cooperation with the UAE “all the way to a possible trade agreement.”

When Merz speaks of “peace and stability,” he means the imperialist reordering of the Middle East through subjugation and war. Germany has politically, diplomatically and militarily supported the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians. The Gaza Strip has been almost completely destroyed, and more than 70,000 people—mostly women and children—have been killed.

From the outset, the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained that the Gaza genocide is part of a comprehensive imperialist war strategy. The aim is the complete subjugation of the resource-rich and geostrategically central Middle East as preparation for a

direct military confrontation with Russia and China. Because the European powers share these objectives and want to secure their share of the spoils, they support US war threats and regime-change plans against Iran. Shortly before his departure, Merz openly threatened, “The days of the Iranian regime are numbered.”

The reactionary Gulf monarchies function not only as regional proxies of imperialism but also as partners in the return of German imperialism to the world stage. The Gulf states were looking “very strongly” to Germany and expected leadership from Berlin within the EU, Merz declared at the conclusion of his trip. He said he had pledged to meet that expectation. In reality, this is not about expectations from others but about the old, intrinsic great-power ambitions of German imperialism. In a major foreign policy address, Merz proclaimed that Germany must once again “learn to speak the language of power politics itself.”

That the Greens and the Left Party are now criticizing Merz as an alleged defender of human rights is hypocritical in two ways. They fundamentally support the federal government and German-European world-power policy and primarily accuse Merz of not taking a sufficiently aggressive stance toward the United States. When they themselves are in government, they have no qualms whatsoever about cooperating with the most reactionary regimes—from the visit of former Green Economy Minister Robert Habeck to Qatar to the public alignment of former Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock with Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of the new al-Qaeda regime in Syria.

Workers and young people must understand Merz’s trip as a serious warning. The ruling class will—just as it did in the 1930s when it brought Hitler to power—stop at nothing to enforce its global great-power interests and suppress the growing resistance against them.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact