

The Munich War Conference

Peter Schwarz
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The Munich Security Conference (MSC), which brought together around 60 heads of state and government and hundreds of ministers, politicians, high-ranking military officials and security experts from around the world over the past three days, was marked by sharp tensions. But on one issue, all participants agreed: The era in which the interests of the imperialist powers were concealed by diplomatic manoeuvres and international institutions is over. A new era has begun in which they are decided openly through military force and war.

The debates at the conference did not revolve around how to prevent a third world war but on how best to prepare for one. Ruling circles in the US and Europe view war as necessary and inevitable.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz opened the conference with the words: "Together, we have crossed the threshold into an era that is once again openly characterised by power and, above all, great power politics." The international order based on rights and rules no longer exists, he said. It is the task of the European powers to recognise this reality and "make preparations for the new era."

In a fascistic diatribe, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio attacked the international politics of recent decades. The idea that the end of the Soviet Union 35 years ago meant "the end of history" was a "dangerous delusion" that is now being corrected by the Trump administration.

"In this delusion," Rubio said, "we embraced a dogmatic vision of free and unfettered trade. ... We increasingly outsourced our sovereignty to international institutions while many nations invested in massive welfare states at the cost of maintaining the ability to defend themselves. ... To appease a climate cult, we have imposed energy policies on ourselves that are impoverishing our people. ... And in a pursuit of a world without borders, we opened our doors to an unprecedented wave of mass migration that threatens the cohesion of our societies, the continuity of our culture, and the future of our people." This, according to Rubio,

"was a foolish idea that ignored both human nature and the lessons of over 5,000 years of recorded human history. It has cost us dearly."

While U.S. Vice President JD Vance launched a frontal attack on the European powers at last year's Munich Security Conference, Rubio struck a more conciliatory tone. In a speech full of anti-communist and fascist stereotypes, he invoked "centuries of shared history, Christian faith, culture, heritage, language, ancestry, and the sacrifices our forefathers made together" and emphasised: "We want Europe to be strong."

The statesmen present thanked him with a standing ovation. Rubio's statement, "We do not want our allies to be shackled by guilt and shame," was no doubt particularly well received by the Germans present, who have long advocated that the crimes of the Nazis should not be allowed to slow down their renewed aspirations for greatness.

However, Rubio was unable to resolve the sharp transatlantic tensions. The European powers are not troubled by Trump's fascist policies—the destruction of democratic rights, the ICE Gestapo's hunt for migrants, the deployment of the army domestically, the establishment of an authoritarian regime. Nor do they object to his imperialist wars—the genocide in Gaza, the bombing of Iran, the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Maduro—or his preparations for war against China. Here, the European ruling class is fully on board.

Although Trump is assembling a huge armada against Iran and threatening massive military strikes against the country, not a single voice was raised against this at the conference. On the contrary, the conference served as a promotional platform for the next imperialist crime. Reza Pahlavi, the son of the Shah who was overthrown by the 1979 revolution, was invited as a guest and spoke on the sidelines of the conference to supporters who had been carted in from all over Europe. His demand: The US should bomb Iran and install him as the new ruler, just as the CIA did with his father after the 1953 coup.

Tensions between the European Union (EU) and the US

centre on Trump's punitive tariffs on European goods, his threat to annex Greenland by force, and above all, his attempt to reach an agreement with Russia over the heads of the Europeans.

The escalation of the war against Russia is at the heart of the “preparations for the new era” that Chancellor Merz called for in his Munich speech. Russia's attack on Ukraine has long served as a pretext for the European powers to arm themselves without limit and push ahead with their own plans for great power status. But their claim that Russia is the aggressor and plans to conquer all of Europe turns reality on its head.

In fact, it is NATO that has broken all agreements since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union and has continued to advance eastward. All of Eastern Europe is now part of the military alliance. In 2014, the US and Germany organised a pro-Western coup in Kiev and began systematically arming the Ukrainian army. Plans to bring the country, with its 2,000-kilometre-long (1,242-mile-long) border with Russia, into NATO ultimately provoked an attack by Moscow, which saw its existence threatened. NATO deliberately provoked the war.

Since then, NATO has been waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Since the start of the war, €380 billion in Western military and financial aid has flowed to Kiev. Without it, the war would have been decided long ago. But Trump has largely cut off US financial aid and insists that the Europeans bear the full cost. US weapons will only be supplied to Ukraine if the Europeans pay the bill in advance.

They are not prepared to back down. They want to subjugate Russia and need the war to realise their own plans for great power status. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Germany alone has appropriated over €1 trillion for the rearmament of the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) and the preparation of its infrastructure for war. The entire society is to be put on a war footing and conscription reintroduced.

Chancellor Merz explained in his Munich speech: “Europe must not retreat into risk avoidance. Europe must open up opportunities and unleash its energy. ... It must become a factor in global politics, with its own security policy strategy.” He reaffirmed the goal of making the Bundeswehr “[the strongest conventional army in Europe as quickly as possible.”

French President Emmanuel Macron demanded that Europe must become a geopolitical power, explicitly including nuclear deterrence. He said he had already

begun a “strategic dialogue” on this with Chancellor Merz and other EU heads of government.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer committed to close military cooperation with Europe. Europeans must “build our hard power, because that is the currency of the age. We must be able to deter aggression, and yes, if necessary, we must be ready to fight.”

There is no opposition among the established parties to this military superpower policy, which will inevitably lead to a third world war absent the political intervention of the international working class. In addition to Germany's Social Democrats, the Greens, the Left Party and their sister organisations also support it.

The Democrats who travelled to Munich from the US supported the European demand for an intensification of the war against Russia. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) which is allied with Germany's Left Party, accused Trump of creating conditions through his withdrawal “where Putin can sabre rattle around Europe and try to bully around our own allies there.”

The threat of war can only be stopped by an independent movement of the international working class, which must bear the costs of war and militarism. Such a movement must combine the struggle against social spending cuts, dictatorship and war with the struggle against their cause, capitalism, and for the construction of a socialist society. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Socialist Equality Parties (SEP) are fighting for this perspective.



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