

Heads of British and German armed forces insist Europe's population must be made ready for war

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The highest-ranking military leaders in Britain and Germany have made an unprecedented joint appeal for more military spending and a “whole-of-society” effort to prepare for war with Russia.

Air Chief Marshal Richard Knighton, the UK’s chief of the defence staff, and Gen Carsten Brauer, Germany’s chief of defence, published their 743-word call in the *Guardian* and *Die Welt* following last week’s Munich Security Conference (MSC), making the case for the largest increase in military spending across Europe since Hitler’s armies laid waste to the continent.

The two generals declared themselves to be “voices for a Europe that must now confront uncomfortable truths about its security.”

In language echoing their respective political leaders, Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Chancellor Fridrich Merz, Knighton and Brauer declared the Cold War over, and the “peace dividend” that allowed national wealth to be used for social services and welfare. “Now it’s clear that the threats we face demand a step change in our defence and security,” they said, citing Russia as the prime “risk that demands our collective attention.”

The immediate targets of the generals’ message were Europe’s governments, who have committed to spend 5 percent of GDP on defence and security by 2035. To them, Knighton and Brauer spoke of the “hard choices and prioritisation on public spending” ahead, and the need to make “people” understand “the difficult choices governments have to take in order to strengthen deterrence.”

But when the generals warn, “History teaches us that deterrence fails when adversaries sense disunity and weakness,” this is not merely chastising government failures to stump up finances. It is an instruction to NATO member states to stop dragging their feet and wage the

necessary offensive against Europe’s workers, whose opposition to ramping up military spending for unpopular wars at the expense of essential services is at the root of the “disunity” identified.

For example, in its article accompanying the generals’ statement, the *Guardian*—which leads the political offensive to develop a constituency for war among the affluent middle class—pointed in alarm to fresh polling in Britain by YouGov showing “a minority favour tax rises (25%) or spending cuts (24%) to fund greater spending on the armed forces – including those who say it is very important to increase UK hard power.”

It notes with greater concern that “The German and French publics are also now less likely than they were last year to support increased defence budgets if it meant a trade-off with other investment, according to a poll for Politico this month.”

For the working class the generals’ statement must therefore be seen as a declaration of the class war that must be conducted if imperialist war is to be waged—one emanating from the highest echelons of the military.

The scale of this planned offensive must be grasped. The past year has already seen a massive increase in military spending in Europe. EU defence expenditures are estimated to have reached €381 billion in 2025, up by 11 percent from €343 billion in 2024 and over 60 percent higher than in 2020. But this is nowhere near what is being demanded by the war agenda of the European bourgeoisie.

Moreover Germany, together with France and the UK, account for over 40 percent of the total increase. And this is nothing compared with what has been pledged.

NATO has mandated as a condition of membership that 3.5 percent of GDP be spent directly on the military—i.e., soldiers, tanks/armoured vehicles, missiles and drones—by

2035. An additional 1.5 percent must be spent on allied national security infrastructure, including roads and bridges able to transport vast military forces.

Reaching this 5 percent of GDP spending is way beyond the current plans of most EU states. Last June, *The Parliament*, covering EU policy, warned that “reaching a 5 percent target would, for many countries, mean tripling their current spending levels.”

It noted that Belgium and Italy “are already running high budget deficits with no obvious way to raise the extra funds, short of politically risky welfare cuts. In some European countries, meeting the 5% target would put fragile coalition governments at risk of collapse.”

Italy would need to find more than €60 billion per year to raise its present 2 percent military spend to 5 percent of GDP, when its national debt now exceeds €3 trillion (135 percent of GDP).

Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot declared that even 3.5 GDP spending on the military was “unfeasible” in the short term, with the country’s €12.8 billion defence funding plan unfunded beyond 2025.

Spain’s Defence Minister Margarita Robles confirmed Madrid would meet the existing 2 percent goal that year, involving a lot of creative book-keeping, but stressed that it would not pursue the 5 percent target.

All these governments are now being put on notice. Even the biggest military spenders have a mountain to climb.

This week, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul urged Paris to match President Macron’s calls for European financial and military sovereignty with concrete measures. “Anyone who talks about it needs to act accordingly in their own country,” he told broadcaster *Deutschlandfunk*.

During the Munich summit Macron had told a group of major European newspapers that France’s problem was that it “never had reforms like the ones initiated in the 2010s in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, which are paying dividends today.”

He also championed common European debt mechanisms (eurobonds) to help finance military spending. But with France having the EU’s third-highest debt burden relative to GDP after Greece and Italy, Wadephul stressed Berlin’s opposition to eurobonds for defence financing and insisted that NATO member pledges “were commitments to national contributions.”

As for the UK, Starmer has finally agreed to bring forward a 3 percent GDP military spending target (up from today’s 2.3 percent) to 2029. This means raising an

extra £17.3 billion a year through more savage cuts. But a letter from 40 military experts to Starmer, reported by the *Times* Wednesday, insists that he now plan to double defence spending.

The letter states that Britain faces a “1936 moment”, comparing the threat from Russia to that of Nazi Germany prior to World War II. It is signed by former senior military staff, spy chiefs and diplomats—including Sir Ben Wallace, a former Conservative government defence secretary, Lord Dannatt, former head of the army, and Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of the spy agency MI6.

The group said that Britain and its NATO allies “continue to talk tough on deterrence and collective security, yet our actions fall catastrophically short of matching this rhetoric and of meeting our treaty obligations”.

Another key signatory, Admiral Lord West, who served as the First Sea Lord and a security minister under New Labour governments, told the *Telegraph*: “Keir Starmer needs to put his money where his mouth is. Clearly, the Treasury doesn’t want to increase spending at the speed it is needed. The money has to come from either increased tax, cutting other areas like welfare or borrowing more.”

What is being demanded is an end to incremental measures in favour of a frontal assault on jobs, wages and living conditions and the wholesale destruction of social services and benefits.

Knowing that this will provoke an eruption of class struggle throughout Europe, the ruling class must accelerate their moves to dictatorial rule, mobilising the repressive apparatus of the state, including the armed forces, against the working class and strengthening the far-right—just as Trump is doing in the United States.

So too must the working class prepare itself, above all by recognising that the defence of its fundamental social interests and democratic rights is bound up with an internationalist and revolutionary struggle against the imperialist governments now dragging the world towards fascism and military barbarism.



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