

German Chancellor Merz and Canadian Prime Minister Carney attend massive NATO exercise for war with Russia in Arctic

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Over 32,000 troops from 14 NATO member states are currently exercising in Norway and Finland to create the conditions for the opening of a northern front in a war with Russia. The biennial military operation was visited Friday by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, underscoring the importance attached by the imperialist powers to war readiness in the Arctic.

The “Cold Response” exercise includes land, sea and air operations across northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden. About 25,000 troops are engaged in operations on Norwegian territory and off the coast from March 9 to 19. A further 7,500 troops are operating in northern Finland, while air operations take place across all three Nordic countries. The largest contingent of troops, at close to 4,000, comes from the US, but all of the major European powers have also sent substantial numbers.

The region is on the frontline of NATO’s aggressive military pressure on Russia. Finland has a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia, while Norway has a shorter 200-kilometre frontier. Moreover, Norway’s coastline provides direct access to key naval passages for Russian commercial and military shipping to reach the open ocean.

The exercise occurs amid a massive militarisation across the entire Arctic region, as the imperialist powers and smaller states jostle for advantage in a strategically crucial region for trade, energy resources and waging war. While Cold Response and other exercises are ostensibly aimed at Russia, tensions are sharpening among the European and North American imperialists. This is reflected in the fact that Cold Response is part of NATO’s larger Arctic Sentry, an operation launched in January in response to US President Donald Trump’s threats to use military force to seize control of Greenland from Denmark. Trump and his fascist advisers view control over Greenland as essential within the framework of their “America First” agenda, which demands complete US dominance over the entire Western Hemisphere as a platform for waging global wars against China and other rivals.

Merz emphasised the need for European imperialism to strengthen its military independence from the US in remarks to the media during his visit to Norway, where he met the military leadership of the contingent of more than 1,200 German soldiers participating in the exercise. “We have relied on other launch

systems and other countries for too long,” he said while visiting the Andøya Space Port in northern Norway, where a Munich-based start-up is attempting to produce a European rocket capable of transporting satellites into orbit. “Europe’s time is now.”

The next test launch of a rocket from the Space Port is due between 19 March and 19 April, depending on the weather. The mission aims to transport five European satellites into Earth’s orbit. The European imperialists view this endeavour predominantly from a military standpoint, since independent satellite technology is crucial for selecting targets during a war and maintaining secure communication channels.

The extensive collaboration between Germany and Norway on military matters was underlined by the presence of Defence Minister Boris Pistorius alongside Merz during the visit. In addition to space-based technology, German and Norwegian companies are cooperating to build a next-generation submarine for combat in Arctic and coastal waters. Germany’s TKMS (Thyssen Krupp Marine Systems) has led the project, which has resulted so far in Berlin and Oslo ordering six submarines each. TKMS is in the running for a multi-billion-dollar contract to supply the Canadian Navy with up to 12 submarines as part of Ottawa’s major military build-up in the Arctic.

Carney’s visit, however, reflects a shift in Canadian imperialist foreign policy that goes beyond the decision of where to purchase its new submarine fleet. Ottawa has borne the brunt of Trump’s “America First” agenda, including sweeping sanctions on trade and threats by the US president to annex Canada as the 51st state.

Carney’s Liberal government has therefore undertaken a calibrated shift in foreign policy, summed up in Carney’s speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos calling for a coalition of “middle powers” and the recently released Defence Industrial Strategy.

While still seeking to conclude an economic arrangement with the US, which is the destination for three-quarters of Canadian exports, Carney is pushing to build closer ties with the European imperialist powers on military and economic matters. The predatory character of such a project was made clear by Carney’s remark in Davos that major powers who are not “at the table,” i.e., the “table” of imperialist geopolitics where territories and plunder are divided up, will be “on the menu.” His plan to increase military spending to 5 percent of Canada’s GDP within a decade

proves that being at “the table” means being ready for World War III. Prior to his trip to Norway, Carney visited Yellowknife in Canada’s Arctic to announce C\$35 billion (about €22.3 billion) in investments in military infrastructure.

Similar considerations of how best to project the interests of German and European imperialism are motivating government officials across the Atlantic. Merz and the overwhelming majority of the German bourgeoisie want for the time being to retain some level of military cooperation with the US, since European imperialism remains heavily reliant on American technology and equipment for waging war. European industry is also dependent on the US market for a major portion of exports. But Germany, France, and Britain are at the same time engaged in a huge remilitarisation programme that will see trillions of euros spent in the coming years on developing a more “independent” war machine aimed at enabling the European imperialist powers to aggressively pursue their own interests around the world as an opponent of the US if necessary. Merz’s Christian Democrat/Social Democrat coalition government alone, with the full backing of the opposition Greens and Left Party, plans to spend €1 trillion over the next decade on the military and war-related infrastructure.

Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer have fully endorsed Trump’s criminal war against Iran, hoping to secure their share of the spoils in the Middle East on the back of the demolition of Iranian society by American and Israeli weapons. At the same time, the European powers fear being destabilised by the war, which is driving up energy prices and threatens to unleash a new wave of refugees on Europe’s doorstep. Thus, Merz remarked pointedly in Norway that a “persuasive strategy” as to how the war can be brought to an end is required.

Trump’s decision to loosen sanctions on Russia to allow oil exports in response to the rapid increase in its price to over \$100 a barrel due to Iran’s blockade of the Strait of Hormuz provoked criticism in Berlin. German imperialism is concerned that the war in Iran is cutting across the drive to inflict a military defeat on Russia and subordinate the vast country to a semi-colony of European and American imperialism.

Reports prior to Merz’s Norway visit suggested he may be seeking from Støre a commitment to increase oil and gas supplies to Europe. Norway, which already supplies 48 percent of Germany’s natural gas and 17 percent of its oil imports, does not have the infrastructure to do this. Already throughout 2024, energy prices spiked drastically in the oil-rich country due to the connection of its energy grid with Europe and the rapid growth of exports since the beginning of the US/NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, prompting a growth in opposition to the government.

Støre hosted a meeting with Carney and the four other Nordic prime ministers in Oslo Sunday, where the breakdown of the US-led world order found expression. The gathering was the first of its kind and resulted in a joint statement and press conference at which the six leaders pledged to strengthen military operations and investments throughout the Arctic. The joint statement pledged common efforts in Arctic security, the defence industries, responses to hybrid threats and infrastructure. It also demanded a

continuation of the war against Russia and committed to continued military and financial support to Ukraine, from which the US under Trump has largely withdrawn.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said at the press conference that Copenhagen has faced “totally unacceptable pressure from the US and US President” over Greenland. She applauded Carney for his proposal for a coalition of “middle powers” and argued that the downfall of the old world order meant that “something new” must be built. Støre, while clearly trying to avoid direct criticism of Trump by insisting that the stronger military presence in the Arctic was taking place “within the Transatlantic alliance,” opened the press conference by referring to the threats in “a world where autocratic forces are moving ahead and weaponising critical resources.”

Both Denmark and Sweden have committed to cooperate with Macron’s proposal to expand France’s nuclear arsenal throughout Europe, which he announced just days after Trump launched his illegal war in the Middle East. Carney praised the initiative at the press conference. Finland is in the process of removing a ban on the import of nuclear weapons to the country that has been in place since the 1980s.

The aggressive militarist policies pursued by the governments in Germany, the other European powers and Canada entail a vast intensification of the class war agenda against the working class. Ruling classes are seeking the destruction of jobs in civilian industries, the elimination of public services and social programmes to pay for bloated military budgets and the expansion of highly exploitative precarious employment. These attacks will drive millions of workers into struggle across both the European and North American continents, from the imperialist centres of Germany, France or Canada, to more remote regions in the far north being dragged into the new redivision of the world among the great powers. The decisive task is to arm these struggles with a socialist and internationalist programme to oppose war and overturn the capitalist system that gives rise to it.



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