

Crimes against peace: The Nuremburg Trials precedent and the illegal US-Israeli war against Iran

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On March 27, David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, delivered a lecture of exceptional political and historical significance at Friedrich-Alexander University (FAU) in Nuremberg, Germany.

The event, organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), was the first public meeting held by the IYSSE at FAU—and it drew an enthusiastic response. Over 80 students, youth and workers attended despite the lecture falling during the university’s spring break, a testament to the depth of concern over the war and the growing audience for a socialist antiwar perspective.

The Nuremberg lecture capped a highly successful series of public meetings across Germany, following well-attended events in Leipzig and Berlin.

North opened his remarks by addressing the city’s indelible association with the Nuremberg Trials of 1945–46, in which the surviving leaders of the Nazi regime were prosecuted for the supreme international crime—the planning, preparation and waging of wars of aggression. It was this legal and historical foundation that North brought to bear, with devastating precision, on the present war against Iran.

North stressed that it was not the Holocaust but the waging of crimes against peace that the Nuremberg Tribunal designated as the supreme crime. Quoting the tribunal’s verdict, he explained: “A war of aggression is ‘the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.’” He emphasized the implications of this formulation: “Every atrocity committed in the course of an aggressive war, every civilian killed, every building destroyed, every act of

torture and collective punishment flows from and is contained within the original criminal decision to launch the war.”

North then applied this standard to the present conflict, stating: “If the standards established at Nuremberg are applied, then the war against Iran is without any question a crime against peace, and all those who are waging it are criminals. This is not an exaggeration. It is a legal fact. Trump is a criminal. Hegseth is a criminal. Rubio is a criminal.”

North laid out the indictment in meticulous detail—the absence of a congressional declaration of war, the violation of the United Nations Charter, the torpedoing of a known unarmed Iranian vessel, the deliberate sabotage of diplomatic negotiations, and the fraudulent claims of productive talks serving as cover for the largest deployment of US ground forces to the Middle East since 2003.

North devoted particular attention to the language employed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who has boasted of unleashing air power “unbound by stupid laws of engagement” and “undeterred by what so-called international institutions say,” and who told American troops: “We are not defenders anymore. We are warriors, trained to kill the enemy and break their will.”

North told his audience that they, as Germans, would recognize this as the language of *Vernichtungskrieg*, the war of annihilation that Hitler waged against the Soviet Union. Hegseth’s declaration of “no quarter, no mercy for our enemies,” North noted, constitutes a violation of international law codified since the Hague Convention of 1899. Were Hegseth to face trial, North said, every one of these statements would be introduced as

evidence.

A significant portion of the lecture was devoted to the complicity of the European imperialist powers. North pointed out that the European Union's response to the war was to denounce not the US-Israeli surprise attack but Iran's retaliatory strikes as "inexcusable," a staggering inversion of reality. The same governments that had for four years invoked international law and the sanctity of sovereignty to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine had not uttered a single word of opposition to an indisputably unprovoked American war against a nation of 91 million people.

The "rules-based international order," North concluded, had been exposed once again as a euphemism for the right of the imperialist powers to make war on whomever they choose. He drew particular attention to the re-emergence of militarist ideology in Germany itself, where politicians are once again speaking of building a "warrior culture" and preparing for confrontation with Russia.

North also underscored the role of the media as an instrument of war propaganda. Citing the Nuremberg prosecution of Hans Fritzsche, head of the Nazi Press Division, he recalled that the media's role in promoting aggressive war was treated at the trials not as a peripheral matter but as an integral component of the criminal enterprise. By this standard, North argued, the propagandists promoting the present war—whether writing for the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or their German counterparts—are themselves culpable under the principles established eighty years ago.

North explained that Trump's criminality is not an aberration but the expression of a terminally diseased social order. "We can't explain the crisis from Trump," he said. "We have to explain Trump from the crisis."

In his conclusion, North pointed to the international working class as the countervailing force to imperialist war, emphasizing that the fight against war must be waged on an international scale through the construction of a revolutionary socialist leadership.

The lecture was followed by a lively and wide-ranging discussion, reflecting the seriousness with which the audience engaged with the political questions raised.

This lecture is essential viewing. We urge all our readers to watch it in full, share it as widely as possible

across every platform, and follow David North and the WSW on X/Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. In a period when the corporate media functions as a propaganda apparatus for aggressive war—precisely the role for which Nazi press officials were prosecuted at Nuremberg—the WSW stands as the voice of historical truth and socialist principle. Subscribe, share, and help build the audience for this critical political perspective.



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