

Germany abandons its post-war nuclear commitments as Merz and Macron forge atomic alliance

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On Friday, the German-French Security and Defence Council met in a maintenance hangar at the Nörvenich military airfield near Cologne, under the chairmanship of Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron. The fact that two heads of government of major European states chose to hold their political consultations between fighter jets and hangar doors is no coincidence—it is deliberate theatre. Flanked by two French Rafale and two German Eurofighter jets, the image being conveyed to the public was unambiguous: the two largest economies in the European Union are preparing for nuclear war.

The day before, immediately prior to Macron's arrival in Germany, two Rafale jets capable of carrying nuclear weapons had practised aerial refuelling together with two Luftwaffe Eurofighters, using a French tanker aircraft. On Friday at the air base, further joint "maintenance exercises" followed, with German and French soldiers working on each others' aircraft. What sounds like mutual maintenance assistance has in reality enormous political significance: the preparation of the logistical and operational integration of the two national air forces into a joint nuclear command structure.

What government communiqués describe as "deepening cooperation on nuclear deterrence" is the practical launch of a policy agreed between Merz and Macron in March this year. As the next concrete step, the Security Council resolved that German soldiers will participate actively in a French nuclear exercise for the first time this autumn. This means that Germany—which hitherto, within the framework of NATO nuclear sharing, has relied on US nuclear bombs and German carrier aircraft—will for the first time be directly incorporated into the nuclear doctrine of a second nuclear power.

On Thursday, at the opening of the meeting at Bensberg Castle, a cooperation agreement was signed covering the following points:

- A "permanent nuclear steering group" is to be established which—in the official formulation—is to "deepen strategic culture and shared threat assessment." What sounds innocuous in practice means the integration of German military personnel into France's nuclear planning. German officers are to

participate in future in the operational planning of nuclear weapons that would, in the event of war, strike targets in Russia.

- Joint nuclear exercises are to begin before the end of this year. French Rafale combat aircraft with nuclear armaments are—as the consultations at Nörvenich suggest—to be stationed temporarily at German bases and incorporated into joint manoeuvres. France's nuclear deterrent, the *Force de frappe*, will thereby acquire operational bases on German soil for the first time.

- Close cooperation has been agreed in the areas of "deep precision strikes" (the precision use of long-range missiles) and air defence. These terms describe the capability of striking targets deep in enemy territory—that is, in Russia—with conventional and potentially nuclear weapons.

These agreements represent a historic rupture with Germany's post-war order. Under the Two Plus Four Treaty of 1990, Germany committed itself to renouncing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. It is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The nuclear cooperation with France now being initiated effectively undermines these commitments, even as Berlin formally maintains its adherence to them.

Chancellor Merz had already indicated the direction in October last year. Asked by the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Sonntagszeitung* whether "the largest country in the European Union will at some point be unable to avoid an honest discussion on this question," he replied: "The time is not yet ripe for that. My concern right now is conventional defence." The implication was unmistakable: after the massive spending on conventional rearmament, nuclear armament would follow.

The steps taken in Bensberg and Nörvenich are the political implementation of that announcement. The fact that the consultations were held at an airforce base underscores the military significance of the agreements. This is not about abstract strategic concepts—it is about the concrete preparation for the deployment of nuclear weapons.

German-French nuclear cooperation is the direct response to the changed stance of the United States under President Donald

Trump. His punitive tariffs against the European Union, his threat to annex Greenland and his attempt to reach an understanding with Russia over the heads of the Europeans have brought Paris and Berlin closer together. The US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran—which Washington is waging not through NATO or a “coalition of the willing” but together with Israel alone—has accelerated this development.

The European powers fear being excluded from the resource-rich and strategically decisive Middle East region. At the same time, anxiety is growing that US support for Ukraine will dry up entirely. Since Trump’s return to the White House, Washington has largely halted its financing of the Ukraine war and now supplies weapons only when Europe pays for them.

Behind the façade of German-French unity staged at Bensberg and Nörvenich, however, deep rivalries and conflicts of interest lie concealed. The most spectacular expression of these tensions is the collapse of the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), the Franco-German-Spanish project to build a sixth-generation combat aircraft. In early June, on the margins of the Western Balkans summit in Montenegro, Chancellor Merz had informed Macron that he would not be pursuing the project further.

The FCAS had been regarded as the flagship project of European defence cooperation and was central to a joint nuclear weapons arsenal. Its failure lays bare the irreconcilable national antagonisms involved. Dassault was unwilling to share know-how and intellectual property with Airbus; Airbus refused to cooperate without access to key technologies. The technical requirements also differed fundamentally: France wanted a lightweight aircraft capable of landing on aircraft carriers whilst simultaneously carrying nuclear bombs. Germany, which has neither aircraft carriers nor nuclear bombs, wanted—in the words of an insider—“a bomb container that can fly as far as Moscow.”

Behind these technical differences lies the fundamental conflict of power interests that also overshadows the Bensberg agreements. Paris insists that the decision to deploy nuclear weapons rests solely with the French president—a constitutionally enshrined prerogative that Macron explicitly reaffirmed in his March speech. Berlin, for its part, is not prepared to accept a nuclear sharing arrangement in which only Paris has its finger on the trigger.

French military circles fear that Germany is overtaking France militarily. In a closed hearing before the Senate finance committee, French Chief of the Defence Staff, Fabien Mandon, warned that Germany could soon massively outpace France militarily and in terms of arms production. He called for a drastic acceleration of French rearmament.

The price of nuclear rearmament and war preparations is enormous—and it is being loaded onto the shoulders of the working class. On July 6, one day before the start of the NATO summit in Ankara, the German government approved a historic war budget. The regular budget of the Defence Ministry will

rise in 2027 by 32.7 percent within a single year—from 82.7 billion to 109.7 billion euros. Together with the “special fund” for the Bundeswehr and aid for Ukraine, military expenditure amounts to 151.3 billion euros.

To raise these sums, the government has resolved to dismantle the welfare state: the Health Ministry budget is being cut by 34 percent, *Bürgergeld* (basic income support) is being reduced, social budgets frozen and then slashed, and the retirement age is to rise further.

The German-French nuclear axis makes clear how far the drive to war has advanced and how urgent it is to take up the struggle against it. All parties in the German parliament, the Bundestag, support the pro-war policy. The media insist that nuclear rearmament is urgently necessary and circulate the absurd argument that nuclear war can only be prevented through nuclear deterrence.

The only party opposing the war conspiracy is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP). Its manifesto for the Berlin state parliament elections taking place in September opens with the words:

The danger of a nuclear war has never been greater than today. The Merz-Klingbeil government is rearming on a scale not seen since Hitler and is brazenly preparing for a war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power. The cost of this madness is being borne by the workers through mass redundancies, cuts to social services and, ultimately, with their lives.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is standing in the Berlin House of Representatives elections to oppose this warmongering, which is being pursued by all the parties in the Bundestag, and to build a socialist movement. We declare openly: A catastrophe can only be prevented if the masses themselves intervene in political affairs and put an end to capitalism and its logic of profit.



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