

After Moscow's nuclear warnings: Merz intensifies Germany's war offensive in Kiev

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Only days after Russia again threatened NATO with the use of nuclear weapons and President Vladimir Putin warned of a “fatal point of no return,” German Chancellor Friedrich Merz traveled to Kiev on Sunday to further expand Germany's involvement in the Ukraine war.

The visit underscores the extreme danger of the present situation. Instead of taking Russia's warnings as a reason to halt the escalation and prevent a direct war between nuclear-armed powers, the German government is responding by expanding arms deliveries and building up Ukraine's capabilities to strike deep inside Russia.

Merz announced the release of a further €1 billion in military aid, as well as €350 million for the repair of Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Germany intends to supply thousands of interceptor drones and jointly develop and produce drones, missiles and the corresponding software with Ukraine. Particularly far-reaching is the planned joint development of weapons systems with a range of more than 1,000 kilometers, enabling Ukraine to strike targets deep inside Russian territory.

Significantly, Merz was accompanied by Economy Minister Katherina Reiche and representatives of major German corporations, including Siemens Energy, Hensoldt, Diehl Defence and Quantum Systems. German government representatives explicitly told Reuters that the expanded cooperation was intended to ensure that money and technology flow back to Germany and strengthen the German arms and drone industries.

This gives concrete form to the policy that Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul formulated with remarkable openness only a few weeks ago. Germany is now Kiev's strongest financial and military supporter, he declared, adding: “And naturally, the German defense industry must benefit from this.” The government had urged Ukraine to order more weapons from German companies.

While Merz was in Kiev, Russian attacks on the Ukrainian capital continued. As recently as Saturday, the Russian Foreign Ministry had explicitly warned foreign citizens and diplomats against remaining in Kiev and announced further attacks. Among the targets hit in the latest strikes was a major bridge across the Dnipro River.

Merz responded with the familiar logic of escalation. “If

Russia is not stopped, its war machine will sooner or later be directed against us,” he declared upon arrival. Moscow, he said, understands only the “language of strength.”

Against the background of Moscow's recent warnings in particular, Merz's statements amount to playing with fire.

At the end of September, Moscow formally warned NATO that an attempt to blockade or cut off the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad could lead to the use of nuclear weapons. Putin reinforced the threat on Thursday, declaring that an attack on Russian territory, including Kaliningrad, would place the use of “all the weapons at our country's disposal” on the agenda. At the same time, he himself warned of the “logic of escalating, increasingly harsh retaliatory measures,” which could very quickly reach a point from which there would be no return.

The Kremlin's nuclear threats are not a progressive response to NATO's escalation. The Putin regime represents the interests of the Russian capitalist oligarchy and responds to the pressure of the imperialist powers with Russian nationalism and military retaliation. But for precisely this reason, it is all the more irresponsible to simply dismiss the warnings of a nuclear power as bluff and continue escalating without end.

That is exactly what is happening. Every threshold crossed so far becomes the justification for crossing the next one. At first, weapons were supplied that were supposed to be used exclusively on Ukrainian territory. Then attacks on Crimea and Russian border regions were supported. This was followed by drone attacks deep inside Russia, on refineries and military installations. Now Berlin is directly involved in developing weapons with ranges of more than 1,000 kilometers for strikes deep inside Russia.

Such a spiral develops its own logic. No government can know at what point the opposing side will conclude that its strategic interests or its very existence are directly threatened and that it must take military action against the states enabling, financing and technically preparing such attacks. In a conflict between powers possessing thousands of nuclear weapons, this policy threatens millions of lives and ultimately the survival of large parts of Europe.

But the recklessness of the German government does not come out of nowhere. It has objective economic, geopolitical and social causes.

The business model of German capitalism over recent decades is coming under ever greater pressure. It was based on comparatively cheap energy, a strong industrial base and massive export surpluses—particularly in trade with the United States and China. These conditions are breaking down.

The US government raised tariffs on European car imports to 25 percent this year. For the German economy alone, this is projected to result in long-term production losses running into the tens of billions of euros. At the same time, competition with China is intensifying. In July, German exports to China fell by 9.5 percent in a single month. Volkswagen has announced a further 50,000 job cuts, while BMW is also eliminating thousands of jobs.

The ruling class is increasingly responding to the economic crisis through intensified militarization and a shift to a war economy. Around €140 billion is earmarked for the Bundeswehr and defense alone in 2027. More than €108 billion is already available in 2026. Berlin intends to reach NATO's target of 3.5 percent of gross domestic product for direct military spending as early as 2029.

At the same time, Germany is seeking to expand its independent role as a European great power. The historical parallel with the world wars of the 20th century does not lie in any identity between today's conditions and those of 1914 or 1939. But once again, a deep crisis of world capitalism is intensifying the struggle over markets, raw materials, spheres of influence and strategic dominance, while German imperialism massively increases its military weight and makes Eastern Europe the central theater of its foreign policy.

In the First World War, the German leadership's *Mitteleuropa* plans aimed at the economic and political domination of large parts of Eastern Europe. In the Second World War, under National Socialism, this drive took the form of a racist war of annihilation for the conquest of *Lebensraum*, raw materials and Soviet territory. Today, German imperialism is once again establishing itself as Europe's leading military power and assuming the leading role in arming Ukraine to wage war against Russia.

These external conflicts are compounded by enormous internal tensions. As on the eve of the First World War, today militarism is developing under conditions of mounting social contradictions and political opposition.

In France, the crisis has already assumed explosive forms. A nationwide movement of high school students against teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms and the deterioration of schools has spread to hundreds of schools. Within a few days, around 5,000 people, overwhelmingly young people, were arrested. At the same time, teachers and public sector workers are striking against cuts and wage freezes, while the government seeks to impose austerity measures amounting to tens of billions of euros.

Social opposition is also growing in Spain. On Saturday, hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Madrid alone against

exploding rents and evictions, while protests took place in around 50 cities. Banners called for a general strike.

The same fundamental conflicts are developing in Germany. Students are protesting against conscription and militarization, while tens of thousands of industrial jobs are being destroyed, and corporations are implementing historic cost-cutting programs. At the same time, ever larger portions of the state budget are flowing into the Bundeswehr and the arms industry.

War is not merely a diversion from these social conflicts. It arises from the same crisis of the capitalist system that produces trade war, job destruction, social cuts and political instability. But militarization at the same time becomes an instrument for bringing domestic opposition under control: through demands for "national unity," conscription, the strengthening of the state apparatus of repression and fascist forces, and the subordination of society's resources to the requirements of war.

From this analysis, the Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties in Europe and internationally draw the conclusion that opposition to war and social cuts cannot be separated. We support the protests of students, university students and workers and fight for the building of independent rank-and-file committees in schools, universities and workplaces in order to wrest these struggles from the control of the established parties and trade union apparatuses, link them together and unite them across national borders.

The developments in France show with particular urgency that young people cannot fight alone. They must turn to the working class, and workers must make the defense of young people against state repression their own cause. The same applies on a European scale. Struggles against cuts in France, against the housing crisis in Spain, against job destruction and conscription in Germany, and against militarism throughout the continent must be unified on the basis of a common international perspective.

The alternative to the ever more dangerous spiral of rearmament, retaliation and nuclear threats does not lie in supporting one or another of the competing capitalist governments but in building an independent socialist anti-war movement of the European and international working class.



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