

Burnham and Merz agree closer Anglo-German military and economic ties

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British Prime Minister Andy Burnham and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz held their first face-to-face meeting in Berlin Thursday. The main agenda items were military and security partnerships and rebuilding some of the economic ties severed by Brexit.

The two leaders ratified the Kensington Treaty initiated by former British prime minister Keir Starmer, centred on strengthening military assurances between Britain and Germany—part of a raft of such agreements between various European parties aimed at offsetting the risk of a waning American commitment to NATO and deepening aggression against Russia.

This week, Burnham and Merz added a new security partnership to these agreements, aimed at combatting “cyber-attacks, sabotage and other hybrid threats.”

Burnham set up the meeting with the comment: “Attacks on our infrastructure, our businesses and our democracies are not a distant threat. They reach into people’s homes and workplaces, and they are designed to make us weaker and more divided.”

The UK government press release explicitly named Russia as the source of “the hybrid threat from our adversaries”. Though not directly named in government readouts, the media is on hand to add Iran to this list. The day of Burnham and Merz’s meeting, Germany’s *WirtschaftsWoche* claimed Iranian intelligence was eyeing US military bases in the country.

This keeps the fire burning under allegations of a Russian sabotage plot at Leipzig airport in Germany August 4 and the absurd allegations of an Iranian plot at RAF Fairford in the UK—six of whose alleged conspirators have since been released on bail.

Within a few hours of Merz and Burnham speaking to the media, British police announced two Latvian nationals resident in the UK had been arrested in the

early hours of the morning inside the perimeter of RAF Molesworth—a hole was reportedly found in the fence.

The pair were initially arrested on suspicion of trespass on a prohibited site and criminal damage, and later on suspicion of an offence under section 4 of the National Security Act 2023—a much more serious offence implying the trespass was carried out to cause harm to UK interests. They are both still in custody and counter-terror police are leading the investigation.

British Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband was meanwhile in Ukraine to announce new sanctions on Russia. They target individuals and companies which “produce or transport Russian oil”, “facilitate the production or global trade of items used to support Russia’s ballistic missile capabilities and fuel their military-industrial base”, or help the country evade current financial sanctions.

The day’s events are the latest hardening of positions over a war between Russia and NATO-backed Ukraine which is now more rapidly piling up civilian casualties. Miliband told the media, “My message to Putin is clear—you cannot wait us out.”

He spoke as he visited the site of a recent Russian nighttime strike on an apartment block in Pryluky which killed 22 people, including five young children, and wounded another 50. The morning of his visit, a Russian strike in Kramatorsk hit a bus, killing 30 people and wounding 18.

Civilian casualties in Ukraine in the first eight months of the year (15,280) have surged by 55 percent compared to the same period last year as Russia ramps up ballistic missile and drone strikes. Available figures show over 2,000 civilian casualties in Russia in January-July this year. The number of dead and wounded soldiers is in the hundreds of thousands.

Indicating the preparations for war across a much

wider front, Burnham and Merz also discussed Germany joining the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), a joint initiative to develop a new generation of “Tempest” fighter planes. Current members include Italy, the UK and Japan, with Canada recently being given observer status.

Burnham told the media Thursday, “We are talking today about defence collaboration and I’ve indicated to the chancellor in our discussion, prior to this, our openness to Germany joining GCAP, the next generation of fighter aircraft. That is something that we seek to progress in the coming period.”

This is important for Germany after the collapse of a similar initiative with France and Spain this June.

The two leaders also discussed, in Burnham’s words “bring[ing] the UK closer to Europe”. An at least partial reversal of the “hard Brexit” engineered by Boris Johnson’s Conservative government has become more urgent for the British ruling class as an anticipated closer relationship with the US has fallen apart. Burnham has expressed concerns in this regard about the impact on Britain of a planned protectionist Made In Europe scheme, mainly targeting China.

The ruling class in Germany and France has broadly warmed to the idea as Trump’s America has become more hostile, seeking to martial Europe’s economic and military clout. Asked about Britain and Made In Europe on the morning of Burnham’s visit to Germany, French finance minister Roland Lescure told the UK government through the BBC, “Come back, and you’ll be at the table, and we discuss all these things together.”

In Berlin, Merz said, “From our German side, I can assure you that we will do anything we can do to bring the UK closer and closer back to Europe, to the European continent, to the European Union. And I’m really happy to have you here today with this clear message from your side and with this clear answer from our side.”



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