Trump meets Putin and Xi in China, while European imperialists plot escalation of war on Russia at Berlin summit

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The pompously entitled "Declaration Toward Peace" issued by China, Russia and the United States following Thursday's trilateral meeting between presidents Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump was nothing of the sort. Released the same day as the German government assembled over 30 heads of government in Berlin to discuss a massive escalation of the war on Russia for years to come, the trilateral meeting in Shenzhen signified the sharpening antagonisms among the imperialist powers in North America and Europe amid an acceleration of a third world war for control of the globe's raw materials, markets and labour.

The leader of US imperialism, which has waged uninterrupted wars around the world for over 35 years, attended the meeting less than nine months after launching a war of extermination against Iran on February 28. Trump oversaw the execution of Iran's head of state, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and members of his family within hours of the war's launch, and thousands of civilians over the following weeks. The would-be "peacemaker" has requested a defence budget of $1.5 trillion for 2027, a 42 percent increase compared with the previous year.

Trump met Putin and called him his "friend," as Ukrainian missiles and drones, funded and supplied by the European powers and American imperialism, were raining down on Russian cities. Moscow threatened in September that it would retaliate with nuclear weapons if NATO blockades the Russian territory of Kaliningrad, as the aggressive military alliance's troops remain amassed along Russia's borders in the Baltic, Poland and Finland.

The US president hailed his "very special relationship" with Xi following a one-on-one meeting held under conditions of simmering economic conflicts between Washington and Beijing, which could erupt again as soon as January when temporary relief on tariffs expires. Substantial sections of the American ruling class, including a faction in Trump's own administration, are demanding more aggressive economic measures against and ultimately war with China to block its economic rise and defend US global hegemony. In the days leading up to the summit, Washington imposed new measures restricting the export of Nvidia chips via third countries to China.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz hosted the so-called Coalition of the Willing later Thursday in Berlin alongside Britain, France and other NATO members and allies. The Coalition was established in early 2025 after Trump made clear Washington would slash its direct financial and military support to Kiev, pursue a bilateral accommodation with Russia to open up the country to American capital, and continue to supply Ukraine with military equipment only to the extent that the European powers paid for it.

"We will support Kiev as long as necessary," Merz declared following the gathering, which was also attended by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner. "But this war must end with a Ukraine that retains its territorial integrity, has strong security guarantees on its side and is, above all, embedded in European security." He proposed four-party talks with the US, Russia, Ukraine and Europe on "neutral territory," a rebuke to Putin's invitation earlier in the day for European representatives to visit Moscow for talks. "We want a peace for Ukraine that is just and permanent," Merz added.

The fact of the matter is that Europe is arming for war. Germany is spending over €1 trillion to modernise its military and related infrastructure, while the European Union (EU) has committed some €800 billion to militarisation across the bloc. The European Commission proposed a €45 billion loan this week to continue financing the Ukrainian regime through 2027, following on from an EU support package of €90 billion last year to fuel the war. The political establishment attempts to justify the destruction of what remains of social programs and public services to pay for militarism and war with lurid claims about a looming Russian invasion of the continent within three years.

Behind all the phrases about "peace" and "diplomacy," the imperialist powers represented at the two summits Thursday are aggressively fuelling a new violent redivision of the world. Their unanimous support for Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza since 2023 testifies to the barbaric means they are resorting to in pursuit of their economic and geostrategic interests.

As the Socialist Equality Party (US) noted at its party congress in August, the third world war is not a future prognosis, but it is metasticising rapidly. "It is spreading globally as a chronic and expanding condition, colonizing new regions, fusing previously separate conflicts, and progressively transforming the world economy and every national state in preparation for the general conflagration toward which it tends," stated David North.

For the European imperialists, led by Germany, France and

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Britain, waging the war to impose a strategic defeat on Russia—the world's second largest nuclear-armed power—is deemed as essential. To pursue their global ambitions, they require access to Ukraine and Russia's rich deposits of critical minerals, energy resources, cheap labour and the geostrategic dominance over the Eurasian landmass. They fear that Trump's push for an accommodation with Putin will cut the European capitalists out of the spoils and put paid to their aspirations to become a global power.

When Merz talks of "peace" on the basis of Ukraine being "embedded" in "European security" and Russia accepting "strong security guarantees" for Ukraine, he means German imperialist dominance over a postwar setup that generates bumper profits for its corporations and banks, backed up by the deployment of European troops. Berlin will host the ninth German-Ukrainian Economic Forum Friday.

Trump's "America first" policy expresses the historic crisis of US capitalism and is based on securing Washington's unchallenged hegemony over the Western Hemisphere in preparation for war with China, the main threat to its global preeminence. To this end he has threatened to annex Canada and launched an invasion of Venezuela to abduct its president. His orientation toward a deal with Putin expresses the sharply divergent interests between the former Transatlantic imperialist allies amid the escalating world war.

However the ongoing factional conflicts within the ruling classes in the imperialist powers play out, including the Democrats' denunciation of Trump for meeting with Putin and Xi, the logic of the deepening capitalist crisis points towards a further escalation of inter-imperialist and great power conflicts.

To fund rearmament and war, governments across Europe and North America are slashing public spending and dismantling workers' democratic and social rights. The hundreds of thousands of mainly young people who have joined protests over recent weeks across Europe, and the millions of workers involved in strike action in France, Italy, Greece, Spain and the October 30 international dockworkers' strike confirm the depth of popular opposition to the ruling class and that the regimes recklessly escalating war have no mass support. The growth of class conflict and increased instability of the imperialist governments make it more likely that they will resort to desperate measures, including the tried and tested method of war to divert social tensions outwards.

Under these conditions, the hope of Xi and Putin that the capitalist oligarchies their regimes represent can obtain some sort of peaceful compromise with imperialism is absurd. Washington and its European counterparts have been determined since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union to carve up Russia in order to subordinate it to a semicolonial status. Washington has demonstrated through its repeated deployment of its residual military superiority over the past three and a half decades in a failed bid to offset its sharp economic decline and its increasingly aggressive trade measures against Beijing and construction of regional alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific like the Quad and AUKUS that it prefers war to being eclipsed economically by China.

Xi and Putin nonetheless agreed with Trump, according to a White House readout, that they are "committed to reform the UN so that the UN can respond more effectively to global challenges and conform to its fundamental mission of international peace and security." Putin asserted that the meeting had written "a new page in the history of diplomacy," while Xi commented, "The three countries share a common perspective of safeguarding world peace."

After the experience of the past 35 years—not to mention the two world wars of the 20th century—these remarks are delusional. They are a product of the incapacity of the capitalist class in China and Russia, sitting atop social powder kegs fuelled by the ruthless exploitation of working classes with powerful revolutionary traditions, to offer any viable alternative to imperialism.

Trotsky's indictment of the "program of peace" promised in one form or another by all of the major belligerents at the outset of World War II applies no less forcefully today. He wrote in the "Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution Manifesto on Imperialist War" in May 1940:

> In vain do the imperialist masters of destiny attempt to revive a program of salvation which was completely discredited by the experience of the past decades. In vain do their petty bourgeois flunkies warm up pacifist panaceas which long ago changed into their own caricature. The advanced workers will not be duped. Peace will not be concluded by those forces now waging war. The workers and soldiers will dictate their own program of peace!

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