# Merz’s war summit in Berlin

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While US President Donald Trump was meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Shenzhen, China, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz convened the so-called “Coalition of the Willing” in Berlin on Thursday. Together with French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Andy Burnham, he welcomed delegations from 37 countries, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and the leaders of the EU and NATO.

The hastily convened summit was a deliberate counter-event to the meeting in Shenzhen. The European powers, led by Germany, want to prevent Washington and Moscow from reaching an agreement on Ukraine that would undermine their geostrategic and economic interests. The reaffirmed commitments of billions in aid, the announced new sanctions and preparations for Western troop deployments are intensifying the danger of a direct military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

The claim that this is about “peace in Ukraine and European security” is a political lie. Behind the war drive lie the efforts of German and European imperialism to dominate Eastern Europe militarily and economically, push back and ultimately subjugate Russia, and gain access to raw materials, markets and strategic trade routes.

### European counter-summit to Shenzhen

The press conference demonstrated how openly these interests dominated the summit. Merz mocked Trump’s meeting with Putin and Xi as a mere “photo opportunity.” “A Yalta format will not bring peace,” he declared, alluding to the reorganization of Europe after the Second World War. “We will not allow Europe to be divided up again. Instead, we are taking our destiny into our own hands.”

Coming from a German chancellor, these statements are particularly revealing. At the Yalta Conference in 1945, the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union negotiated the postwar order in Europe after German imperialism had devastated the continent in a barbaric war of conquest and annihilation. The fact that Germany was not seated at the negotiating table but had to accept the decisions of the victorious powers was the result of its military defeat and its unprecedented crimes.

Eight decades later, the German ruling class is once again asserting its claim to determine the fate of the continent as a leading European and global power. It no longer wants the European order dictated to it by other powers, but seeks to dictate the terms itself. Behind Merz’s demonstrative rejection of a new “Yalta” lies the aggressive return of German imperialism to great-power politics.

Macron declared that the decisive gathering for the reorganization of Europe and its security had taken place not in Shenzhen, but in Berlin. Burnham insisted that decisions about Ukraine must not be made without Kyiv, nor decisions about European security without the European governments.

Trump’s diplomatic maneuvers have nothing to do with a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine war. His administration is attempting to reorganize global power relations in the interests of US imperialism and, at least for the moment, is not ruling out an accommodation with Moscow. The European governments, however, fear that such an agreement would come at their expense. They are unwilling to relinquish either their influence over Ukraine or their claim to a leading role in the reorganization of Eastern Europe.

Merz had already declared in early November: “Our support for Ukraine is therefore in Germany’s and Europe’s interests.” Following the summit, he announced: “We will support Kyiv for as long as necessary.” The aid was intended to enable negotiations “from a position of strength.”

To enforce their interests, the Europeans are demanding a firm seat at the negotiating table. A team comprising representatives of Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Poland, the EU and NATO is to participate in talks with Russia, Ukraine and the United States. US negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner attended the Berlin summit; Trump joined briefly via his son-in-law Kushner’s mobile phone. This, too, reveals the growing tensions between the imperialist powers over the further conduct of the war and the future order in Europe.

### Further billions and Western troops for Ukraine

The joint declaration issued by Merz, Macron, Burnham and Zelensky confirms the long-term continuation of military and financial support. The NATO countries intend to fulfill their commitment of €70 billion for weapons, training and military aid in 2026 and provide at least the same amount in 2027. Added to this is the existing €90 billion EU support loan through the end of 2027. To cover an additional funding shortfall, the European Commission proposed another €45 billion for 2027 on Wednesday. Merz reported “broad European support” for the proposal.

The declaration announces additional missile defense systems and an intensification of economic warfare: measures targeting Russian oil and gas revenues, financial flows, the so-called shadow fleet and the arms industry. Britain also pledged new long-range drones capable of striking targets deep inside Russian territory.

Particularly dangerous are the preparations for Western troops in Ukraine. The declaration reaffirms plans for a European-led, US-supported “Multinational Force Ukraine.” Following a ceasefire, it is to operate in the air, at sea and on land, help rebuild the Ukrainian armed forces and be backed by legally binding security guarantees. Around 2,800 soldiers from 11 countries, including Germany, are currently training in Poland, Romanian airspace and the Black Sea for such a deployment.

At the same time, the threshold for immediate intervention is being lowered. Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called on Britain and France to send soldiers into Ukraine immediately, without waiting for a peace agreement. According to an investigation by Radio France Internationale, French soldiers operating under the codename “Volya” are already in the country providing training and

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weapons maintenance. Paris denies that they are participating in combat operations.

Macron went even further at the press conference. In light of Russia's demands, Ukraine's NATO membership must be put back on the table, he declared—a question that Moscow, like the presence of Western troops in Ukraine, regards as a central red line.

**Escalation to the brink of nuclear war**

The Ukrainian attacks of recent days demonstrate just how explosive the situation has become. Repeated strikes using drones and cruise missiles destroyed a span of the strategically important Kerch Bridge to Crimea; on Thursday, rail traffic also came to a halt. At the same time, Ukraine is stepping up its attacks on energy facilities, refineries and other targets deep inside Russia.

Following the Shenzhen summit, Putin announced a "far more painful" response and declared that, after the attacks on the bridge, Moscow would no longer negotiate limited ceasefires covering energy facilities and the Black Sea. As recently as late September, Russia had threatened the possible use of its entire arsenal, including nuclear weapons, in the event of a NATO blockade of Kaliningrad. In early October, Putin warned of a fatal "point of no return."

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte declared that he did not take the Russian nuclear warning particularly seriously. The European powers are counting on Moscow accepting ever more military provocations. But with every further escalation and every preparation for the deployment of Western ground troops, the danger of a direct war between nuclear powers grows.

**Germany's return as a major military power**

It is no coincidence that Germany is assuming a leading role in this process. The Merz government is using the Ukraine war to advance the largest German military buildup since Hitler and prepare the Bundeswehr for war against Russia.

Significantly, on the day of the Berlin summit, the German Army commissioned eight new battalions in Munster, Lower Saxony. Six are intended to expand "homeland defense," including securing transport routes, energy facilities and other critical infrastructure. At the same time, the final units of Armored Brigade 45, which is to be permanently stationed in Lithuania, were established. By the end of 2027, the brigade is expected to be fully operational with approximately 4,800 soldiers.

Army Inspector General Christian Freuding, the designated new Inspector General of the Bundeswehr, who previously played a leading role in coordinating German arms deliveries to Ukraine, declared at the ceremony: "We want to become stronger every day."

The German government is providing gigantic sums for rearmament. The defense budget is to grow to approximately €153 billion by 2029. The procurement of tanks, fighter aircraft, warships and long-range weapons is being accelerated, along with the expansion of Bundeswehr personnel. This is accompanied by plans for conscription and the militarization of society as a whole.

**Germany's renewed drive to the East**

German imperialism is once again pursuing its historic great-power objectives in the East. During the First World War, the German Empire attempted to bring Ukraine under its economic and military control. During the Second World War, the conquest of Ukraine and Russia was central to Hitler's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. Today, the old imperialist interests are being revived under the slogans of "democracy," "freedom" and "European security."

Ukraine possesses significant deposits of lithium, titanium, iron ore and other raw materials, as well as fertile agricultural land and strategically important industrial and transport capacities. Its integration into the European economic and military sphere is of central importance to German capital.

The close connection between the war drive and these interests is demonstrated by the ninth German-Ukrainian Business Forum, which is taking place in Berlin on Friday, immediately following the summit. Merz is personally opening the conference. Its central themes are private investment, reconstruction projects and joint arms production.

The long-term ambitions extend beyond Ukraine. German and European imperialism are seeking a reorganization of Eastern Europe that will permanently weaken Russia and ultimately open its markets and enormous raw material reserves to exploitation by Western corporations. To pursue their predatory objectives, the imperialist powers are preparing for a direct war against the nuclear power under the guise of defense.

**War abroad, class war at home**

The war drive is also a response to the profound crisis of European capitalism and growing social and political opposition. Everywhere, social cuts, job destruction and attacks on democratic rights are being intensified to shift the costs of rearmament onto the working class. Through militarism and nationalism, governments are attempting to divert social tensions outward and suppress resistance.

But these policies are themselves fuelling ever more powerful protests. Today, Friday, coordinated youth strikes against war, conscription and social cuts are taking place in numerous European countries. At the same time, a nationwide general strike is being organized in Italy against Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government.

These struggles provide the objective basis for the fight against war. But spontaneous protests alone cannot stop the war machine. They must be armed with an independent socialist and internationalist program and united with the struggles of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) fight to build independent rank-and-file action committees in workplaces, schools and universities that unite workers and young people across national borders and prepare a European general strike. The struggle against German and European imperialism requires unity with the Russian and Ukrainian working class against their own reactionary capitalist governments. Only an international socialist movement can prevent the catastrophe of a new world war.

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