Stop the escalation toward World War III! Mobilize the international working class!

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The European NATO powers, above all Germany, Britain and France, are escalating the war against Russia with a recklessness that threatens to unleash a nuclear Third World War.

While Ukrainian drones are attacking Russian ships in the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean, European governments are preparing to deploy their own ground troops to Ukraine and rehearsing war on Russia's borders. They are accepting the danger of a direct confrontation between nuclear powers in pursuit of their economic and strategic interests.

Last weekend, Ukrainian naval drones attacked the Russian freighter *Sparta II* in the Gulf of Finland, as well as the corvette *Merkury* and the freighter *Angara* off the Libyan coast. A Russian warship had already been attacked in the Baltic Sea on November 11. Which NATO countries directly supported these operations has not been publicly established. In the case of the attack off Libya, local media alleged that Britain was involved.

What is clear is that the intelligence capabilities, weaponry and military infrastructure on which Kiev relies have been built up by the NATO powers over many years.

The extension of the war into the Baltic Sea is explosive, as Russia uses this sea route to supply its exclave of Kaliningrad. At the end of September, Moscow warned NATO that a blockade of Kaliningrad could trigger the use of Russia's entire arsenal, including nuclear weapons. Putin reiterated this warning in early October.

The European governments are responding with further provocations. At a joint press conference with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Monday, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte declared that every military incident must be answered with even greater support for Ukraine. Merz described the failure to admit Ukraine into NATO in 2008 as a mistake and backed French President Macron's demand to put Ukrainian NATO membership on the agenda.

Preparations for the deployment of Western ground troops in Ukraine are advancing—crossing another red line of Moscow. On Sunday, a major exercise involving the British- and French-led multinational force that is to be stationed in Ukraine following a ceasefire concluded in Poland. According to investigations by *Le Monde*, French soldiers are already active in Ukraine. Poland is demanding that NATO forces be permitted to shoot down Russian missiles while they are still over Ukrainian territory.

The European governments are running amok, making decisions that heighten the risk of a nuclear catastrophe. What is driving them to pursue this course?

First, they are pursuing definite economic and geostrategic interests, which, particularly in the case of German imperialism, have a long and murderous history.

In both world wars of the last century, the subjugation of Eastern Europe and access to the raw materials, agricultural land and markets of Ukraine and Russia were central objectives of German imperialism. Eight decades after Hitler's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust, the German ruling class is again pursuing great-power ambitions in the East.

Merz demonstrated how closely economic and military objectives are intertwined at the ninth German-Ukrainian Economic Forum in Berlin last Friday. He praised the expanding economic relations, joint arms production and profit opportunities for German corporations. Investments in Ukraine would pay off many times over through export opportunities, joint projects and economic growth, he declared.

These ambitions extend far beyond Ukraine. The European powers are seeking a reorganization of Eastern Europe that permanently weakens Russia and ultimately subordinates its vast resources and markets to their interests.

Second, the escalation is being fueled by growing conflicts among the imperialist powers themselves.

The European governments fear that US President Trump could reach an agreement with the Kremlin at their expense. Washington's diplomatic maneuvers are by no means aimed at establishing a peaceful world order. They are intended to advance its own strategic interests and concentrate its forces on the confrontation with China. Berlin, Paris and London want to prevent the US from securing decisive influence over the reorganization of Eastern Europe depriving them of access to markets and resources.

This was the background to the hastily convened Berlin summit of the "Coalition of the Willing," which coincided with the meeting between Trump, Putin and Xi Jinping in Shenzhen. Merz demonstratively rejected a new "Yalta format." The German ruling class, which was forced to accept the decisions of the victorious powers after its defeat in the Second World War, is reasserting its claim to dominate Europe and violently reshape its political order.

The massive military buildup across the continent is therefore directed not only against Russia. It also serves to project independent imperialist interests amid growing conflicts with the

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United States.

This aggressive great-power and war policy, accompanied domestically by historic attacks on social and democratic rights, is pursued by all sections of the European establishment: the conservative–Social Democratic government of the CDU/CSU and SPD in Germany, the far-right Meloni government in Italy, the Labour government of Prime Minister Andy Burnham in Britain, the nominally liberal Macron government in France, and the Social Democratic–pseudo-left PSOE-Sumar government in Spain. Other pseudo-left forces, such as Mélenchon's La France Insoumise and Germany's Left Party, also support the Ukraine war in its essentials. The Greens have long been among the most aggressive warmongers.

This war alliance is lashing out so wildly that sections of the far right can demagogically pose as opponents of war. Forces such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Le Pen's National Rally (Rassemblement National) in France advocate extreme militarist and nationalist programs. Their objections to sanctions or further military aid for Ukraine do not stem from opposition to imperialist war, but express the interests of those sections of capital that regard the confrontation with Russia primarily as an immediate threat to their businesses and economic positions. Ultimately, they too seek to strengthen European imperialism vis-à-vis the US and make the Continent "ready for war."

Third, the aggressive war policy is inseparably bound up with the growing social and political opposition at home.

For weeks, a wave of strikes and protests has shaken European governments. Last Friday, young people demonstrated in more than 20 countries against war, militarism and the destruction of their future, while a general strike took place in Italy. On Monday, tens of thousands of workers protested and struck in Belgium, followed by workers in Greece on Wednesday.

The ruling classes are responding with militarism and nationalism. They invoke external enemies to obscure social conflicts, demand sacrifices from the population and create the conditions for authoritarian rule. The militarization of schools and universities, conscription, the expansion of the police and intelligence apparatus, and attacks on democratic rights are part of the preparations for a war whose costs are to be imposed on the working class.

At the same time, a recent study by the Körber Foundation shows that despite the constant war propaganda a majority of the population in Germany favors a complete halt to arms deliveries to Ukraine.

The same fundamental class antagonisms exist in Russia and Ukraine. After almost five years of war, hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded, and immeasurable suffering, war weariness is growing. In Ukraine, 75 percent of respondents in September supported the possibility of immediate negotiations with Russia; in Russia, too, a clear majority favors negotiations.

The governments are responding with repression. In Russia, the Duma has passed a further tightening of war-related criminal laws in its first reading. According to the human rights organization OVD-Info, almost 1,400 people have faced criminal prosecution for their antiwar stance since the war began. In Ukraine, opposition to forced recruitment is growing. Following protests against the mistreatment of recruits in a suburb of Kiev, the authorities opened criminal investigations against demonstrators in early November.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has opposed the reactionary invasion by the Putin regime from the outset. Although it was provoked by NATO's systematic encirclement of Russia, it is not a progressive struggle against imperialism. It serves the interests of a capitalist oligarchy that emerged from the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism.

Through his appeals to Russian nationalism and his incitement of Russian workers against Ukrainian workers, Putin undermines the only social force capable of ending the war: the international working class. Neither his military threats nor his attempts to reach an accommodation with the imperialist powers offer a way forward.

The decisive political alternative is embodied by the Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk. He has been imprisoned since April 2024 and was sentenced to 15 years on August 10 because he opposes both the war policies of NATO and the Zelensky regime and Putin's reactionary invasion, and fights for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers on a socialist basis. The demand for his immediate and unconditional release is inseparably bound up with the building of an international antiwar movement.

In the face of imperialist preparations for war in the 1930s, Leon Trotsky counterposed the map of international class struggle to the map of imperialist war. This perspective has acquired immediate relevance today.

While the ruling classes threaten to drive the world into a third world war, the social force capable of stopping them is moving into struggle. The strikes and protests in Europe, the opposition to Trump in the US, and antiwar sentiment in Russia and Ukraine are expressions of an international process. The decisive task is to imbue this movement with an understanding of its common interests. The fight against war cannot be waged through appeals to governments or support for one capitalist camp against another. It requires the independent mobilization of the international working class against the capitalist system.

The ICFI and its sections are fighting to unite these struggles across all national borders, build independent rank-and-file committees and prepare a European general strike as part of an international socialist offensive against war, austerity and dictatorship. The building of a revolutionary socialist leadership is the decisive question upon which the future of humanity depends.



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