

European powers plan ground intervention into Ukraine targeting Russia

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Defying mass popular opposition to a military escalation threatening total war with Russia, London and Paris are planning a large-scale ground intervention in Ukraine. These plans, discussed behind the backs of the population, not only threaten to provoke a nuclear war between Europe and Russia. They entail deep attacks on the working class to finance the build-up of European military forces.

Yesterday, in an article titled “Discussions over sending European troops to Ukraine reignited,” the French daily *Le Monde* reported: “Paris and London are not ruling out leading a military coalition in Ukraine.” It cited a British military source: “Discussions are underway between the UK and France on defense cooperation, particularly with a view to creating a hard core of allies in Europe, focused on Ukraine and wider European security.”

This followed high-level talks between London and Paris, after Ukraine launched long-range strikes on Russia with British Storm Shadow missiles. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot told the BBC that France had authorized Ukraine to fire French SCALP missiles at Russia in “self-defense,” though he refused to say whether SCALP missiles had been used to bomb Russia. Asked if France would send its army to Ukraine, Barrot said: “We do not discard any option.”

Barrot demanded European countries massively increase defense spending. “Of course we will have to spend more if we want to do more, and I think that we have to face these new challenges.”

These plans make clear that the NATO imperialist powers are dragging the world into a Third World War. Even if it does not immediately provoke a nuclear war with Russia, it will also trigger a bitter confrontation with the European working class. President Emmanuel Macron financed his last major increase to France’s military budget last year by slashing pensions. He imposed these cuts by decree, without a parliamentary vote, ordering riot

police to assault mass strikes and protests, ultimately relying on France’s corrupt union bureaucracies to call off the struggle.

Finding billions of pounds and euros needed to prepare the British, French and other European militaries for an armed stand-off against Russia in Ukraine would require further, deep social attacks on European workers.

Le Monde said French military contracting firm Défense Conseil International (DCI), which is 55 percent state-owned, plans to deploy its forces to Ukraine: “Composed of 80 percent ex-military personnel, DCI would be ready to continue training Ukrainian soldiers in Ukraine, as it is already doing in France and Poland. If necessary, it could also maintain French military equipment sent to Kyiv. To this end, DCI has been approached by Babcock, its British counterpart already present in Ukraine, to share the latter’s local facilities.”

Elie Tenenbaum, a strategist at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) think-tank, told *Le Monde* France is also considering “other models.” This meant, *Le Monde* wrote, plans “to send conventional troops to Ukraine, in the event of a ceasefire agreement, to guarantee the country’s security and Russia’s compliance with the ceasefire.” These troops, he said, would be “positioned in eastern Ukraine,” on the border with Russia.

Such plans face overwhelming popular opposition, above all, in the working class. Earlier this year, a Eurasia Group poll found that 91 percent of Americans and 89 percent of Western Europeans oppose a NATO ground intervention into Ukraine. Nonetheless, the European imperialist powers are proceeding precisely with such plans.

Le Monde presented a carefully sanitized version of discussions in European ruling circles of the war with Russia and Trump’s election as US president. Trump has repeatedly said he wants to scale back US military support

to Ukraine. The European powers, for their part, are calling for working out a deal with Trump based on escalating their own military involvement.

The various plans for Ukraine circulating among Trump's advisers, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, "involve Kyiv promising not to join NATO for at least 20 years. In exchange, the US would continue to pump Ukraine full of weapons to deter a future Russian attack. Under that plan, the front line would essentially lock in place and both sides would agree to an 800-mile demilitarized zone."

"We can do training and other support, but the barrel of the gun is going to be European," the *Journal* cited a member of Trump's transition team as saying. "We are not sending American men and women to uphold peace in Ukraine. And we are not paying for it. Get the Poles, Germans, British and French to do it."

The argument that such a policy would provide a lasting basis for peace in Ukraine has no credibility whatsoever. The Kremlin invaded Ukraine in order to keep Ukraine from joining NATO, and there is no reason to believe that it would accept a settlement in which Kiev would merely postpone its decision to join the NATO alliance for two decades. More broadly, however, the European escalation in Ukraine is bound up with European war plans against Russian allies, like China, Iran and Syria.

Such wars would prevent any secure and lasting peace on the Russian-Ukraine border and likely provoke an explosive escalation of the conflict. Indeed, in a series of provocative public statements over the last several days, the French military command has made clear it aims to participate in a global war escalation, so as to independently assert French imperialist interests.

The world "we shaped" after the end of the Cold War "is falling apart," French Army Commander General Pierre Schill told French officers last week in a speech at the Military School in Paris. "The instability of the context forces us to think seriously. Who knows what our role will be tomorrow in security guarantees offered to Ukraine or to Lebanon? ... Our goal is to intimidate, to be feared."

French armed forces Chief of Staff General Thierry Burkhard told *Le Figaro* that France must be ready to send troops to Ukraine, the Near East, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region, working closely with NATO. "All these crisis areas have their own particular features, and it is not clear that we should prioritize the one or the other. We must manage all these theaters. ... This requires a global vision, and above all coordinating action with our allies.

No single country can manage these crises alone."

Such threats of global military intervention not only intensify the conflict between the European imperialist powers and other major powers, but also intensify tensions among European imperialist powers, which twice in the 20th century exploded into world war. Indeed, discussion of European intervention in Ukraine immediately raises the question of which European powers will control Ukraine's vast mineral, industrial and agricultural resources.

Currently, the French army is working on plans minimizing the role of Germany, Europe's dominant economic power. Plans for a European intervention in Ukraine "raises the question of the leadership of this military coalition. Germany currently appears considerably weakened by its domestic political difficulties," *Le Monde* wrote, citing the IFRI's Tenenbaum: "France and the UK, the only two nuclear powers in Europe, would therefore play a key role. The Baltic States, Poland and the Scandinavian countries also appear to be essential candidates."

Whatever rival invasion plans are being discussed in European ruling circles, they underscore that capitalist media have marketed the Ukraine war to the public on false pretenses. It is not a war to protect Ukrainian independence from Russia. Rather, it is a war, driven above all by the imperialist powers, to decide how Ukraine's economy is to be carved up between the major powers.

Avoiding a further catastrophic escalation of the war requires alerting the working class in France, Britain, across Europe and internationally to these dangers, and building an international, socialist movement in the working class against imperialist war.



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