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زبانهای اروپایی

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05.05.2025

Global explosion of military spending and the struggle against imperialist war



Airmen with the 436th Aerial Port Squadron use a forklift to move 155 mm shells ultimately bound for Ukraine on April 20, 2022 at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. [AP Photo/Alex Brandon]

Today, May 3, the *World Socialist Web Site* is hosting its International May Day Online Rally at 3:00 p.m. EDT. A central theme of the rally is the need to build an international, socialist movement of the working class against imperialist war.

The urgency of this perspective was underscored by the release this week of a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), documenting a staggering \$2.7 trillion in global military spending in 2024.

Over a third of global military spending was accounted for by American imperialism, with Washington spending \$997 billion on war during 2024, the last year of the Biden administration. The figures also revealed dramatic increases in war budgets in Germany (to \$88.5 billion) and Japan (to \$55.3 billion), increases of 28 percent and 21 percent in a single

year, respectively. Germany rose from the seventh-largest military spender in 2023 to the fourth-largest last year.

The US-led NATO alliance spent over \$1.5 trillion, or 55 percent of the global total. This is 10 times more than the \$149 billion allocated by Russia, which is being targeted by the imperialists for plunder in the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The surge in military spending has been relentless over the past decade, rising by over \$1 trillion, from the \$1.67 trillion total in 2015. But this is only a down payment. The imperialist powers have unveiled further huge increases to their war budgets with the aim of ensuring their share of the spoils in the new redivision of the world among the major powers.

US President Donald Trump's 2026 budget proposal released Friday calls for a 13 percent increase for the Pentagon, to \$1.01 trillion. To help fund this gargantuan sum, Trump plans to slash the education budget by 12 percent and impose massive cuts to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with other critical social programs.

In Europe, Germany has committed €1 trillion (\$1.13 trillion) to prepare for war: a €500 billion "special fund" to ensure social infrastructure—like roads, bridges and hospitals—is being readied for military use; and €500 billion to procure military equipment. The €500 billion for military equipment equals 11 percent of Germany's GDP, more than the 8.6 percent of GDP that German war credits amounted to during the first year of World War I. Hitler only reached a comparable level of military spending in 1938, after his Nazi regime had been rearming feverishly for five years and just one year before the beginning of the Second World War.

The vast growth of military budgets promises handsome profits for arms manufacturers—the modern-day merchants of death—and the financial oligarchy. The top 100 global arms manufacturers recorded total sales of \$632 billion in 2023, \$317 billion of which were accounted for by US producers.

36 percent growth in sales in 2024 and expects a further 25-30 percent growth this year. Rheinmetall suggests that an increase of military spending by the NATO powers to 3.5 percent of GDP—a goal endorsed by the German, French and British governments—would boost orders by "up to €400 billion" by 2030.

All of the imperialist powers claim their military expenditures are purely for defensive purposes, with budgets designated as "defense spending." This is a grotesque lie. Whether in Washington, Berlin, London, Paris or Tokyo, the ruling elites are arming themselves to the

teeth to advance their predatory economic and geostrategic interests by military means against their rivals and nominal “allies” in every corner of the world.

As for Russia and China, whose regimes desperately seek an accommodation with the imperialist powers, they deploy military sabre-rattling and reactionary nationalism to push for a deal with imperialism and defend their “right” to exploit the working class in their own countries.

The explosive growth in military spending over the past decade has gone hand in hand with the eruption of imperialist wars for control over raw materials, markets, pools of labour and spheres of influence around the world. In 2014, the US and Germany orchestrated a fascist-spearheaded coup in Kiev to topple the pro-Russian president and bring Ukraine directly under imperialist control, a process that provoked Moscow’s invasion in 2022 and the US-NATO war on Russia.

Ten years on, Washington, led by the fascist-minded Trump, is escalating conflicts on multiple fronts in what is rapidly developing into a Third World War. In addition to the ongoing war aimed at subjugating Ukraine, Russia and the entire Eurasian landmass to the interests of American capital, Washington is openly preparing for war with China in the Asia-Pacific to prevent its economic rise.

The latest SIPRI report explicitly pointed to the 2022 US National Defense Strategy as a driver for sharp military spending increases over recent years. That document described China as “the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security” and was released just two weeks after the Biden administration’s National Security Strategy, which pledged to defeat Russia and China in the coming “decisive decade.”

In the Middle East, Washington’s determination to secure its unchallenged hegemony over the energy-rich region has led it to back Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. Washington and Berlin supplied tens of billions of dollars of weapons to the Zionist regime, allowing it to expand its bloody onslaught into Lebanon, where it killed and maimed tens of thousands, and launch strikes on Iran, the main regional target for US imperialism.

In just the first month of a savage bombing campaign against the Iranian-aligned Houthis in Yemen begun by Trump in March, the US has reportedly expended \$1 billion in munitions and military resources.

The European imperialists increasingly view their former US ally as an adversary and have no intention of being sidelined by Washington in the struggle for global dominance. Recognizing that Trump’s “America first” foreign policy means the end of the transatlantic

relationship that dominated the post-war period, the European powers are all stepping up rearmament drives so they can wage war independently of the United States.

This process will sharply exacerbate class conflict. Across the European Union, which recently pledged that its 27 member states would commit an additional €800 billion to war spending, some 93 million people, or 21 percent of the population, were living in poverty during 2024.

The financial oligarchies that dominate official political life in every imperialist country intend to impose the burden of militarism and war on the backs of the working class.

To this end, governments are gutting public spending and all social services and establishing dictatorial forms of rule to suppress popular opposition to imperialist war. The trade unions are whipping up the nationalist jingoism used by the ruling class to mobilise workers for war and enthusiastically promoting the conversion of civilian manufacturing into military production.

Trump's announcement of further military spending increases has been accompanied by his relentless push to erect a presidential dictatorship in the US, lay off hundreds of thousands of federal workers and close entire government departments.

In Germany, the resurgence of military spending by over 80 percent in the past decade has taken place as levels of poverty and inequality have spiked. The ruling elite has systematically rehabilitated fascism in the form of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), and budgets for healthcare have been slashed to the bone.

To secure their predatory global ambitions, the imperialists want to turn the clock back to the brutal, dictatorial social order that prevailed during the two world wars of the 20th century.

At his famous May Day speech in Berlin in 1916 where he called for an end to the bloody slaughter of World War I, German socialist Karl Liebknecht denounced with bitter irony the "three great Prussian state privileges" enjoyed by German citizens at the time: "We can be soldiers, we can pay taxes, and we can keep our tongues between our teeth."

The international working class is the social force capable of halting the ruling elites' revival of imperialist world war and dictatorship. It is already engaged in major class battles, as shown by the burgeoning opposition to Trump and an upsurge in strikes across Europe and North America. The global mass protests against the Gaza genocide express the bitter hostility of millions to the barbarism of the Zionist regime and its imperialist patrons.

The decisive task is to arm workers in struggle with the necessary socialist and internationalist programme to oppose militarism and war and the capitalist profit system that is their root cause. The International May Day Online Rally sponsored by the *World Socialist*

Web Site and International Committee of the Fourth International on May 3 will make a significant contribution to this fight. We urge all of our readers to attend.