

Tensions mount in Poland in run-up to NATO summit

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On May 15, six former Polish ministers of national defense who held office between 1997 and 2015 published an open letter calling for the resignation of Poland's current defense minister, Antoni Macierewicz. The letter highlights mounting tensions within the Polish ruling elite in advance of the NATO summit, to be held July 8-9 in Warsaw.

While Poland has over many years played a key role in NATO's military encirclement of Russia, there are fears that the hysterical Russophobia and Polish chauvinism of the present Law and Justice Party (PiS) government could become a destabilizing factor in the war preparations against Russia and lead to tensions within NATO itself, particularly with Germany and other European members of the alliance.

"All governments of the Republic of Poland have achieved great success in obtaining a strong position within the NATO structures" by presenting Poland as "a stable, predictable and trustworthy country," the letter read. It was signed by Radosław Sikorski, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Bronisław Komorowski, Bogdan Klich, Janusz Zemke and Tomasz Siemoniak. It went on to declare that "in a matter of a few months, the Law and Justice (PiS) government has undermined Poland's position in Europe and NATO."

The open letter strongly objected to a statement made by Macierewicz in parliament on May 11. "It is hard to believe that a politician holding such a responsible post could so carelessly discredit the potential of the Polish army," the letter it stated.

Macierewicz said the Polish armed forces had neither the capacity to ensure the security of Polish territory or airspace nor the ability to protect key facilities in the country. He accused previous Polish governments of "an incorrect assessment of the intentions of the Russian Federation toward Poland and the other European countries." As a result, he claimed, they left the eastern flank of the country "completely unprotected."

Disagreements have also emerged over the defense ministry's plans to turn far-right paramilitary militias into a national defense force called the Voluntary Home Army. This force, equipped with heavy weaponry, is to be

incorporated into the professional army. The project, which is already far advanced, is seen by some military professionals as a possible source of friction.

Macierewicz is a notorious anti-Semite, right-wing nationalist and anti-communist. In 2006, in the government of Jarosław Kaczyński, he was responsible for dissolving the old military secret service and forming a new one. At the time, he accused "most former Polish foreign ministers" of being Soviet agents. He has systematically blocked the promotion of military officers who were trained before 1989 under the Stalinist regime. When he was appointed defense minister of the new PiS government, five generals (i.e., one in four) resigned.

His former superior, Radosław Sikorski, who was defense minister in 2006, recently called him a "nut" in a Twitter post and accused PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński of reanimating a politically bankrupt "Frankenstein of Polish politics."

Macierewicz's claims that the previous Civic Platform (PO) government did nothing to prepare for war with Russia have little to do with reality. *The White Book on the National Security of the Republic of Poland*, published in 2013 by over 200 experts and analysts, states that the strategic potential and capacities of the Polish Armed Forces have been systematically increased since its accession into NATO in 1999.

In fact, Poland has been aggressively building its military potential for years, spending close to 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense and pledging to increase that to 3 percent. The PO government was in the forefront of the drive for sanctions against Russia. It supported the 2014 coup in Ukraine and backed the permanent deployment of NATO troops in Poland.

Despite popular opposition, PO Prime Minister Donald Tusk signed a deal to install a missile defense complex in Poland in 2008. At present, Poland is the venue for Operation Anaconda, the largest NATO military exercise in Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War a quarter century ago.

The main liberal publications, *Gazeta* *Wyborcza*, *Newsweek*, have intensified their anti-Russian warmongering since the coup in Ukraine. Adam Michnik, a leading figure in the anti-PiS opposition movement, stated in 2015 that “Putin can be stopped only by the use of force.”

After a Russian jet flew near a US warship in the Baltic Sea in April, the key foreign policy advisor to former president Bronisław Komorowski (PO), Roman Kuźniar, stated: “The Russian plane should have been fired upon. Too bad the Americans didn’t do it. Not shot down, but fired upon. Secretary Kerry... should have announced that they would definitely do it the next time... what the Turks had done, and rightfully so, a few months earlier.”

NATO’s expansion and the concentration of its armed forces near Russia’s borders, particularly the deployment of forces in close proximity to the base for the Russian Navy’s Baltic fleet in Kaliningrad, have created an extremely dangerous situation. Any Russian war plane flying to or from the Kaliningrad exclave can now be considered a “provocation” and used as a pretext to launch a military attack on Russia.

If Macierewicz is a Frankenstein monster, he is certainly one of NATO’s own making. The restoration of capitalism, the encouragement of nationalism, and years of military provocations against Russia have brought to the fore such right-wing figures. These are people who would not hesitate to instigate a war with the potential of wiping the population of Poland and large parts of Europe off the face of the earth.

The differences within the Polish elite are of a tactical nature. At a time when tensions between NATO and Russia, as well as within NATO itself, are already on the rise, it is in the interests of the European Union and US ruling elites to preserve, at least for a time being, a united front against Russia. The PiS regime is threatening this unity. Criticism by the EU of legislative changes disempowering the Polish Supreme Court have irritated the Polish governing camp and prompted rabid verbal attacks on the country’s main allies.

Ahead of the NATO summit in July, PiS leader Kaczyński, while desperately pressing for permanent bases of the alliance’s troops on the country’s territory, is insisting that the allies are making “a very grave mistake” by siding with the Polish opposition. He has insinuated that former US President Bill Clinton suffers from mental illness because he compared the PiS government to that of Putin and called Poland an undemocratic authoritarian state. Prime Minister Beata Szydło has attacked the European Commission for its criticism of Poland and for its refugee policy.

The Polish opposition fears that such statements will isolate Poland on the international arena. The May edition of *Newsweek* accused the PiS of having “an anachronistic vision of international relations,” particularly in Europe.

WyborczaThe Polish government and its own is not able to realize any of its strategic goals, yet it repels its foreign partners and institutions,” it wrote.

Another factor behind the conflicts within the Polish elite is the sharpening of class tensions within the country itself. Although Poland is generally presented as a “success story” by bourgeois economists, it has never recovered from the impact of capitalist restoration.

Between 1989 and 2003, some 3.2 million industrial jobs were destroyed in a country of less than 40 million people. Two-and-a-half million people have left Poland to work abroad, particularly in Britain and Germany. In 2015, the average nominal income was 904 euros a month, less than half the EU average of 2,299 euros. Despite economic growth, unemployment remains at 10 percent and youth unemployment at 25 percent.

Only a layer of the upper class and middle class has profited from integration into the EU. This is the main force behind the official opposition and the PO.

The PiS, with a mixture of right-wing nationalism and social demagoguery, has been able to profit from the social discontent, particularly in the poorer countryside. But it knows that the country is highly dependent on the EU—a major source of financial subsidies and, with 80 percent of exports and 75 percent of imports, its main trading partner. And it is well aware that it will have to impose further social attacks.

The rewriting of history to glorify far-right authoritarian dictators, the trampling on democratic rights, the intimidation of the population through mass surveillance, and the construction of paramilitary militias are preparations for violent class war against the working class.



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