

German Luftwaffe begin NATO patrols over the Baltic

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On September 1, the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) assumed air surveillance operations for NATO over the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

According to an official Luftwaffe (Air Force) report, four to six Euro Fighters from the 74th Tactical Air Force Squadron based at Neuburg have been deployed to conduct “enhanced Baltic Air Policing”. The German aircraft replaced British Royal Air Force Euro Fighter Typhoons based at the Estonian Air Force Base in Ämari. In Siauliai in Lithuania, four French Air Force Mirage fighter jets have replaced a Portuguese contingent.

At the same time, the so-called Deployable Control and Reporting Centre (DRC), a Luftwaffe mobile guidance headquarters, has been used in Lithuania for the first time under combat conditions. The Bundeswehr is monitoring a section of Baltic airspace using its own and several Baltic radars. The exercise is part of the wide-ranging NATO offensive *Persistent Presence 2016*. During a visit to the German troops stationed there, and accompanied by Luftwaffe Air Marshall Karl Müllner, the Latvian Lt. Gen. Raimonds Graube praised the deployment as “very welcome” and “highly appreciated.”

The return of German troops to Eastern Europe is part of the preparations for war against Russia adopted in early July at the NATO summit in Warsaw. These include the deployment of four additional battalions, each with at least 1,000 troops, to the Baltic States and Poland (Germany will take over command of the battalion in Lithuania), the establishment of a NATO missile defence system in Eastern Europe and a further shifting of the most powerful military alliance in the world in the direction of the Russian border.

All these measures increase the risk of direct conflict with nuclear-armed power Russia.

On 24 August in Tallinn, at a joint press conference with the Estonian Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas, Chancellor Angela Merkel pledged to assist the Baltic states in the event of a conflict with Moscow. She declared, “We are pleased that with Air Policing, in accordance with Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, we can provide mutual support. We have jointly shared the decisions in Warsaw. Germany will be the framework nation in Lithuania. ... I think that means we are showing that in the NATO alliance we stand up for each other.”

Merkel’s words should be carefully considered. Article 5 of the NATO Treaty stipulates that the “Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them ... shall be considered an attack against them all”, and that if such an armed attack occurs, each of them “will assist the Party or Parties so attacked ... including the use of armed force.”

If one of the Baltic states ruled by far-right, anti-Russian parties, provokes a conflict with Russia, Germany is pledged to wage war against Russia.

The day after Merkel was in Latvia, when American Vice President Joseph Biden issued a similar guarantee, the WSWS posed the question: “What would a war between the United States and Russia look like? What is the likelihood that such a conflict would entail the use of nuclear arms, given the fact that the US maintains its right to the ‘first strike’ use of nuclear weapons, and Russia has stated it will respond to incursions into its territory by all means at its disposal, including the use of its nuclear arsenal? How many millions of people in Russia, the US, Europe and beyond will die in such a conflict?”

Neither Biden, Merkel nor the German media and think tanks that regularly call for tougher action against Russia, have yet to provide an answer. However, the

ruling elites know exactly what the potentially catastrophic consequences of its reckless policy would look like. For example, the “Civil Defence Guidelines”, presented by Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière two weeks ago in Berlin, call for the population to prepare for attacks involving biological or chemical weapons, and even nuclear war.

The guidelines were developed in parallel with the “White Paper 2016 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr,” which provides for a massive upgrade of the Bundeswehr, the expansion of military operations abroad and a European foreign and defence policy dominated by Germany. Where many had thought the return of German militarism was merely an extension of military operations in Africa and the Middle East, it is now clear that Berlin is preparing for wars that can also transform Germany and Europe into a battlefield.

Above all, since the British vote for withdrawal from the European Union, the German government has been aggressively pushing the militarization of the continent in order to establish itself as a hegemon and pursue Germany’s imperialist interests throughout the world militarily. During her speech in Estonia, Merkel said it was “agreed that the issues of internal and external security, the fight against terrorist threats [are] a common task of the European Union” and that we would “continue to work together” in these areas.

Asked about “joint military alliances” between the Eastern European countries and Germany, Merkel answered that “institutionalized cooperation between Germany and France and between Denmark, Poland and Germany” already existed. She saw no fundamental obstacles to closer collaboration with other Eastern European states. “Given how it was running with Poland”, she could “not imagine any major ideological barriers that would prevent doing such a thing jointly with Estonia.”

The Estonian prime minister agreed. At the joint press conference, he thanked Merkel “personally for ensuring that she was playing a key role in leading Europe through the crisis”, and had held the continent together “even in the most difficult moments”. At a time when “Europe was suffering from crises and confronted important decisions” you need “a Europe that looks more like Germany.”

The previous weekend, at a meeting of the Visegrad

countries in Warsaw, attended by Merkel, the government leaders of Hungary and the Czech Republic also spoke in favour of a common European army. “We must prioritize security and begin the construction of a common European army,” said Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka also demanded the “starting of a discussion” on the creation of a European army.

It is clear that Berlin’s objective of a European army dominated by Germany will exacerbate the national and political divisions in Europe.

In July, a strategy paper of the European Council on Foreign Relations warned that Germany was confronting an attitude of “dissociation and rejection”. According to the author, it was “too early” to speak of a “countervailing power.” “If Britain, however, leaves the European Union in conflict over the terms of exit, and if, with Marine Le Pen, a national-populist enters the Élysée Palace, this could rapidly change.” The “Opposition to Germany’s dominant role in the European Union could then choose from more powerful allies.”

Tensions over the course of foreign policy are also increasing within Germany’s ruling elites. One wing, led mainly by sections of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations, a joint organisation of the leading associations representing German business, has been calling for some time for closer economic, political and possibly military cooperation with Moscow.

The European working class must oppose all sections of the ruling class and the threat of the continent returning to nationalism, militarism and war with its own independent programme: the building of an international movement against war and capitalism, and the unification of Europe on a socialist basis.



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