

The refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the danger of war

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The crisis caused by the decision of Poland, Lithuania and the NATO alliance to deny entry to a few thousand refugees they have blocked at the border with Belarus is reaching a dangerous new stage.

For days, European politicians and media have been accusing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko of using refugees as weapons in a “hybrid war” against the European Union (EU). The opposite is the case. The EU and NATO are instrumentalizing the fate of the refugees in order to threaten Belarus and Russia with war, mobilize troops, override elementary human rights and incite a right-wing, fascist mob.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, US President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats), German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democrats) and numerous other leading politicians have publicly accused Belarus and its ally Russia of leading a “Hybrid attack” on NATO borders “to destabilize democratic neighbors.” This accusation comes close to a declaration of war on Belarus and Russia, a nuclear power.

The Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet described the “hybrid attack” by the Belarusian government as “the greatest security risk for the region in 30 years.” Poland’s Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki claimed that the entire EU’s stability and security were at stake. Polish opposition leader and former EU Council President Donald Tusk is calling for Article Four of the NATO Treaty to be activated, the first stage of legal mechanisms requiring NATO members to go to war all together in the event of an attack.

Poland has stationed 20,000 heavily-armed troops, beyond its huge police and border protection force, on the border with Belarus. According to Russian news agency Tass, Polish armored units have been moved near the border. The Polish ambassador in Berlin, Andrzej Przylebski, told the right-wing extremist magazine *Junge Freiheit*, “The first shot could be fired soon.”

Ukraine is also moving 8,500 soldiers and police officers as well as 15 helicopters to the 1,000-kilometer border with Belarus and plans to build border fortifications for €560 million.

Poland and Lithuania have sealed off the 1,100-kilometer border with Belarus with a barbed wire fence and declared a

state of emergency. Journalists, aid organizations, and even doctors and ambulances are strictly prohibited from entering a three-kilometer-wide strip of land. There are to be no witnesses or aid workers as refugees are deprived of their basic rights, violently mistreated, and left to die from hunger and cold without food or shelter.

The European foreign ministers intend to decide next week on further sanctions against Belarus. Airlines that bring refugees to Belarus are set to be sanctioned, including not only Belarusian but also Russian and Turkish airlines.

This is being done in conjunction with the US. Following a meeting Wednesday between von der Leyen and Biden, the EU Commission president declared that they had a common assessment of the situation, adding that the US was also preparing more Belarus sanctions “that will be in effect at the beginning of December.”

The reasons behind the hysterical campaign against Belarus and the brutal mistreatment of the refugees at the border have nothing to do with threats to “stability” and “security.”

Since President Lukashenko refused to serve as the EU’s border guard because of Western sanctions, a few thousand of the estimated 12,000 refugees in Belarus have reached the Polish border, almost all of whom want to continue to Germany. Exact figures are not available, as the Polish government prohibits any independent research. The German border authorities registered 5,300 refugees in September and a further 1,900 in October who reached Germany via the Belarus route, amounting to a little more than 7,000 over two months.

By comparison, at the height of the refugee movement in 2015, 10,000 refugees arrived in Germany every day, and were accommodated and cared for.

The hysterical accusations against Belarus and the brutal mistreatment of refugees at the border have entirely different reasons.

NATO and the EU are systematically working to militarily encircle Russia, as they have been ever since German unification and the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union three decades ago. All European members of the former Warsaw Pact as well as three former Soviet republics in the Baltic States have now joined NATO, which has been massively expanding its troop presence on Russia’s borders for

years. The risk of tensions spiraling out of control and turning into open military conflict is constantly increasing.

Belarus Foreign Minister Vladimir Makeï met with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday, after which Lavrov said the two states would reinforce their collaboration “to counter a campaign against Belarus triggered by Washington and its European allies within international organisations.” Russia flew two Tu-22M3 strategic bombers over Belarus Wednesday, one day after a NATO spokesman told the *Daily Telegraph* that the military alliance “stands ready to further assist our allies and maintain safety and security in the region.”

A far more fundamental reason for the latest escalation of hostilities towards Belarus and Russia is the enormous escalation of social tensions within the EU itself.

A handful of oligarchs now control economic life in both Eastern and Western Europe. A small number of billionaires have enriched themselves enormously from the pandemic, while 1.4 million people in Europe have died from COVID-19. The latest wave, which is completely out of control, threatens to double the death toll.

The question of responsibility for the murderous policy pursued by the European governments, which ruthlessly sacrifices human life for profit, is becoming more and more persistent. This coincides with a wave of strikes against unbearable working conditions and for higher wages.

The ruling class is responding with the tried and tested method of diverting social tensions outwards by fomenting nationalism, war propaganda and xenophobia. The brutal mistreatment of refugees at the border, followed by millions of people with shock and horror, serves to intimidate the population, accustom it to death, abolish basic democratic rights and stir up the fascist dregs of society.

Thousands of refugees, including women and small children, are trapped without food, drink or medical care in the forests and swamps of Belarus’ border region. Many do not even have tents and blankets and are exposed to the freezing cold and rain. At least ten have died so far. The mayor of a town near the border estimated the true death toll at 70 to 200. Refugees have repeatedly reported discovering corpses in the forest or in rivers.

Anyone who still manages to cross the border is forcibly brought back to Belarus. Such pushbacks are strictly forbidden, according to the Geneva Refugee Convention. Nevertheless, the Polish parliament gave them its stamp of approval. The Polish PiS government, which is under strong pressure domestically because of its COVID-19 policy, its abortion ban, and the social crisis, is committing crimes against humanity on the Belarusian border.

The European Union, NATO, the German government, the official Polish “opposition” and a large part of the western media are supporting these crimes, in line with the EU’s broader policy of blocking all immigration that has led to tens

of thousands of drownings in the Mediterranean Sea.

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union) called for the EU to help Poland secure its border. “We call this a hybrid threat, where people are used to destabilize the EU and especially Germany - that must not prevail in the world,” his spokesman quoted him as saying.

The conservative daily *FAZ* demanded that the EU “remain tough,” “send out clear signals” and “impose further sanctions.” A “humanitarian solution,” bringing refugees into the EU, is “the wrong political message.”

The Berlin editorial board of the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* wrote, “The Poles have so far secured their external border, which is also that of the EU, on their own. Germany could also offer bilateral help here: with police officers, material resources—whatever Warsaw demands.”

The campaign against the refugees strengthens the right-wing extremists and fascists, which is its intended purpose. Poland commemorated “independence day” yesterday, when the future dictator Jozef Pilsudski took over command of the Polish army in 1919. Tens of thousands of right-wing extremists and fascists marched through the streets of Warsaw. The liberal mayor Rafal Trzaskowski initially banned the parade, but PiS intervened to make sure it went ahead.

Human rights organizations such as Pro Asyl and Amnesty International have protested the mistreatment of refugees on the Polish border, but their appeals are directed to the European governments to change their ways. That will not happen.

Defending the refugees is the task of the working class. It is the only social force that can counter capitalist reaction and defend democratic rights. This struggle is of vital importance for the workers.

A fascistic stench rises from the NATO powers’ assault on refugees in Belarus. The brutal security forces and fascist gangs whose illegal violence is turned against refugees today will serve tomorrow to suppress the resistance and opposition of the working class and youth.

As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) fights to unite the working class based on a socialist program across all national borders in the struggle against social inequality, militarism and fascism. The building of the SGP and of sections of the ICFI in countries across Europe is an urgent task that must be taken up by the working class across the continent.



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