

European powers escalate threats against Russia over Ukraine war

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Seizing upon Russia's invasion of Ukraine to implement long-standing military plans, the European Union (EU) powers are recklessly escalating the crisis. Beyond delivering arms to Ukraine to attack Russian troops, they are discussing a possible cut-off of energy trade and preparing for nuclear war.

This weekend, for the first time since the Cold War ended, France raised the number of its nuclear missile submarines on patrol to two. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, only one of France's four ballistic missile-launching submarines based at L'Ile-Longue island off Brittany is on patrol at any given time. Now, however, *Le Télégramme* wrote, "Never has there been this much tension at the Breton base since France's sea-based nuclear deterrent began in 1972."

A French ballistic missile submarine holds 16 M51 missiles, each of which carries 6 independently-targeted warheads, each exploding with the force of 100,000 tons of TNT. This sub can thus launch 800 times the destructive force of the US bomb that obliterated the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Washington has 14 ballistic missile subs, each carrying 20 Trident II D5 missiles with 14 independent 100-kiloton warheads—around 2,300 times the power of the bomb that killed 140,000 people at Hiroshima.

There is an enormous danger of that nuclear war could erupt as NATO escalates its confrontation with Russia, intervening to arm Ukraine. This danger is now widely discussed, after Moscow placed its nuclear forces on high alert this weekend in response to NATO arms deliveries to Ukraine.

An opinion piece by former US State Department policy planning official Jeremy Shapiro in London's *Financial Times* noted that Moscow might use nuclear weapons in "a scenario in which a superior conventional force such as NATO attacked Russia." Russia, he added, is now "particularly vulnerable to a NATO conventional

attack in Belarus and western Russia, as well as in Ukraine."

The Russian military, Shapiro wrote, "may view NATO troop concentrations in states on Ukraine's eastern flank as potential intervention forces and they may lack sufficient precision-guided weapons in their already very depleted inventory to attack them conventionally." They may, he added, "even believe [a NATO attack] is already happening given European and American arms deliveries and NATO troop movements to eastern Europe." The firing of smaller nuclear bombs could lead to "nuclear escalation to the strategic level (i.e. the end of the world)."

While these dangers are clearly on the mind of the military staffs of all the major powers, the EU is nonetheless recklessly arming the Ukrainians and threatening to strangle Russia's economy.

On Monday, German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht announced new arms deliveries to Ukraine. "Everything that is possible is under consideration and we are also talking about it in the cabinet," she told ZDF. So far, Berlin has sent Kiev 2,700 "Strela" surface-to-air missiles, 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 "Stinger" surface-to-air missiles. Ukraine's embassy in Berlin has now also asked for tanks, self-propelled howitzers, air defense systems, helicopters, reconnaissance and combat drones, transport aircraft and warships.

Berlin is also strengthening its presence in Eastern Europe. It is establishing a mission in Slovakia as in Lithuania, Inspector General Eberhard Zorn said last week. In Lithuania, Germany has led a 1,000-strong NATO battlegroup since 2017, which has been strengthened by another 350 soldiers and 100 vehicles and weapons systems. Germany's air force sent six Eurofighter jets to Romania.

Other EU powers are also arming Ukraine. Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles told Antena3 that

Madrid will send Ukraine 1,370 anti-tank grenade launchers, machine guns and 700,000 rounds. Italy is sending Stinger missiles and machine guns. The Netherlands is sending 200 Stinger missiles, Norway 2,000 M72 anti-tank weapons, Sweden 5,000 anti-tank weapons and Finland 1,500 rocket launchers and 2,500 assault rifles.

French Defense Minister Florence Parly confirmed last week that Paris is delivering lethal weapons and fuel to Ukraine, but refused to reveal the type and quantities supplied.

The NATO powers are also preparing a cut-off of Russian oil and gas exports to Europe that are at the heart of Russia's economy. Oil prices soared to \$140 per barrel yesterday after Washington announced it might embargo Russian energy supplies. Yesterday German Chancellor Olaf Scholz postponed the measure, however.

While provocatively stating that the EU intends to find alternatives to Russian oil and gas, Scholz said, "this won't happen overnight." To compensate for Russian gas imports, Germany alone would need to import the full capacity of the world's 600 liquefied natural gas tankers. Calling Russian oil and gas "essential" to Europe's economy, he concluded: "It's therefore a conscious decision on our part to continue the activities of business enterprises in the area of energy supply with Russia."

Moscow warned such a cut-off would devastate the world economy. "It is absolutely clear that a rejection of Russian oil would lead to catastrophic consequences for the global market," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said. "The surge in prices would be unpredictable. It would be \$300 per barrel if not more. ... European politicians need to honestly warn their citizens and consumers what to expect."

The EU's growing involvement in the war in Ukraine shows that, after the experience of two world wars, the European ruling class is again tobogganing towards a new catastrophe. It is using Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine as an opportunity to put long-prepared military plans into action.

In an article published by Project Syndicate titled "Putin's War Has Given Birth to Geopolitical Europe," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell boasted: "In the week since Russia's invasion, we have also witnessed the belated birth of a geopolitical Europe. For years, Europeans have been debating how the EU can be made more robust and security-conscious ... We have now arguably gone further down that path in the past week than we did in the previous decade."

He called to develop the EU as a major military power, capable of waging wars with heavy losses in Ukraine and beyond. "First, we must prepare to support Ukraine and its people for the long haul," he writes. "Second, we need to recognize what this war means for European security and resilience more broadly." He added, "Third, in a world of power politics, we need the capacity to coerce and defend ourselves. ... Yes, this includes military means and we need to develop them more."

Borrell is proposing a massive military build-up, subordinating social life to the army's diktat. "The core task for 'geopolitical Europe' is straightforward," he concludes. "We must use our newfound sense of purpose first to ensure a free Ukraine, and then to re-establish peace and security across our continent."

Who is Borrell trying to fool? The EU is not securing a "free Ukraine," but escalating a NATO war drive against Russia that is spiraling out of control. Behind empty propaganda phrases about "peace" and "security," the NATO powers are headed straight towards World War III.

The militaristic and essentially fascistic character of the European rearmament and war drive emerges most clearly in Germany. There, the ruling class has seized upon Putin's invasion to launch a long-planned rearmament programme worth hundreds of billions. The defence budget is to increase by at least €24 billion to over €71 billion annually. After the unspeakable crimes of the Nazis, Germany seeks once again to become Europe's dominant military power.

A catastrophe can only be avoided through the development of the international class struggle and the construction of an anti-war movement in the international working class, on a perspective for the conquest of power and the establishment of world socialism.



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