Lithuania to expand blockade of Russian goods as Ukraine war widens

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Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda told Reuters on Wednesday that Lithuania, in cooperation with the European Union, is preparing to expand the list of goods that it is blocking Russia from transporting to its semi-exclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea.

Earlier this week, Lithuania implemented a partial blockade of Kaliningrad, prompting threats of retaliation from Moscow.

"We are looking forward to implementing the next stages of the sanctions," Nauseda told Reuters. "We feel the support of the European Union (EU), because this is a decision made by the European Union."

Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Russia's Security Council, said the blockade would prompt a Russian response that would "have a serious negative impact on the people of Lithuania."

"Of course, Russia will respond to hostile actions. Appropriate measures are in the works and will be adopted in the near future," he said Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the EU Ambassador to Russia in a "resolute protest" of the transit ban. The ministry said it "demanded an immediate resumption of the normal operation" of transit to Kaliningrad, threatening that "retaliatory measures will follow."

Nauseda all but dared Russia to respond militarily, declaring, "I do not believe that Russia will challenge us in a military sense, because we are a NATO member."

The escalation of the EU/ Lithuanian blockade of Kaliningrad comes amid a rapid expansion of the war, both in geographic scope and in intensity.

On Monday, the Ukrainian armed forces hit several oil drilling platforms of the company Cherneftegaz on the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea which was annexed by Russia in 2014.

On Wednesday, Ukrainian forces carried out an attack 150 kilometers inside the Russian border, in Novoshakhtinsk in the Rostov region, using kamikaze drones.

The attack came just weeks after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed the country was "not interested" in carrying out attacks inside Russia and after US President Joe Biden said the US would not encourage "Ukraine to strike beyond its borders."

Although it was not clear what kind of drone was used in the attack, the United States has provided Ukraine with hundreds of kamikaze drones, known as the "switchblade."

The *Financial Times* reported that "A post by Ukraine's 72nd Mechanized Brigade read: 'For some reason, the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Refinery is on fire in Russia,' later adding that hitting such a target with a 'kamikaze drone' 150km deep into the enemy-controlled territory is 'not bad!'"

Russia, meanwhile, continued to unleash devastating attacks inside Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Defense claims that a Russian strike on a shipbuilding plant in the Ukrainian port of Nikolaev killed up to 500 troops on Tuesday, in a shocking display of the bloody character of the war that is raging on the European continent.

Ukrainian officials have acknowledged that up to 500 troops are dying each day of the war, with up to 1,000 daily casualties. Just three weeks ago, Zelensky put the daily death toll at 60-100.

These strikes exemplify the expanding scope and lethality of the war, which is rapidly spreading throughout Ukrainian and Russian territory, and threatens to become a direct shooting war between Russian and NATO forces.

Meanwhile, International Energy Agency head Fatih

Birol has warned that Europe should be prepared for a total shutdown of Russian gas exports into the European Union. "Europe should be ready in case Russian gas is completely cut off. The nearer we are coming to winter, the more we understand Russia's intentions," he said.

The *New York Times* cited Michael Kofman, the director of Russia studies at CNA as saying that the key cities of "Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, could fall in the near term," in what the US-based Institute for the Study of War called "a clear setback for Ukrainian defenses."

Amid these continued military setbacks on the battlefield, the EU and NATO are rapidly integrating Ukraine in the US-backed alliance system. Alexey Arestovich, a prominent adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said Wednesday that Ukraine's eventual membership in both the EU and NATO is a mere formality, declaring that Ukraine was already a "de facto" member of the NATO alliance.

On Tuesday, European Union officials said the EU will accept Ukraine as a candidate member this week.

Moreover, Polish President Andrzej Duda announced that the so-called Trimarium forum or Three Seas Initiative, a revival of the inter-war Intermarium alliance, has created "participatory partnership" status for Ukraine. The Triumarium is openly aimed at curtailing Russian influence across Eastern Europe. It already encompasses the majority of countries between the Black and the Baltic Seas, including Poland, Croatia, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Slovenia.

Zelensky's advisor Arestovich boasted, "We became the 13th country of the Trimarium… And 12 Trimarium countries are EU members. That is, almost half of the EU countries. This means that our integration with the EU has gone much further than everyone is currently assessing."

Even as the Ukraine war spins out of control, the US is rapidly escalating military tensions with China. State Department spokesman Ned Price declared that the US intends to continue sending warships in so-called "freedom of navigation" operations in the Taiwan Strait, after Chinese officials allegedly told the US in private that the waterway was closed to US ships.

He said, "We're concerned by China's aggressive rhetoric, its increasing pressure and intimidation regarding Taiwan." He added, "and we'll continue, as we have said before, to fly, to sail, and to operate wherever international law allows, and that includes transiting through the Taiwan Strait."

China, meanwhile, sent one of the largest sorties of military aircraft toward Taiwan so far this year, with 29 aircraft entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone Tuesday.

With the war in Ukraine rapidly expanding, and the US showdown with China over Taiwan escalating, US President Joe Biden gave a speech on "Putin's price hike" on Wednesday, declaring that "this is a time of war," and that the US population had to accept rising prices as part of the war effort.

With the cost of the war surging, last week the Senate Armed Services committee proposed to increase the 2023 military budget, already the largest on record, by a further 6 percent.

The further expansion of imperialist war, both in its European and Pacific theaters, will have devastating consequences for the US population, already reeling from runaway inflation and facing the prospect of a major recession within the next year.

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