

NATO moves to militarize Rotterdam port in plan for total war on Russia

Robert Stevens
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The NATO alliance is pushing ahead with plans for total war against Russia that are bound up with moves to impose martial law against workers in Europe. This finds particularly sharp expression in NATO's plans to militarize the Port of Rotterdam, Europe's busiest port.

On July 14, in an article headlined "Europe's biggest port readies for potential war with Russia", the *Financial Times* reported that the port is "gearing up for a potential conflict with Russia by reserving space for ships carrying military supplies and planning where to divert cargo if war breaks out."

Boudewijn Siemons, chief executive of the Port of Rotterdam Authority, told the newspaper: "If large volumes of military goods would have to be shipped, we'd look to Antwerp or other ports to take over some capacity and the other way around. We see each other less and less as competitors. And, of course, we compete where we have to, but we work together where we can."

During the Cold War, the FT notes, Rotterdam "did not have a dedicated quay" for the transportation of armaments. Siemons said one or more ships would be docked at the quay for several weeks, four or five times a year, at various locations.

Now, NATO is discussing plans involving military activities and exercises that could cause massive disruption to civilian container shipping, the FT writes: "Rotterdam's container terminal is the only place where the port could safely transfer ammunition from one ship to another. There would also be amphibious military exercises several times annually."

The Dutch government is implementing these plans just two months after NATO told it to prepare to militarize the port of Rotterdam. This measure would not only impact this massive complex, which stretches over 40km along the river Meuse. Rotterdam, a city of over 2.3 million, is at the heart of the Randstad region made up of the Netherlands' four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht), with 8.4 million inhabitants in total--nearly half the Dutch population.

The Rotterdam project is one strand of plans by the NATO military alliance and European imperialist governments to place all of society on a war footing, requisitioning civilian vehicles and drivers for war purposes.

Also on July 14, Politico reported, citing the Dutch *Algemeen Dagblad*: "The Dutch defense ministry is mulling plans to convert old trains into mobile emergency hospital vehicles capable of transporting wounded soldiers." Politico made clear this is bound up with plans for large-scale requisitioning of civilian transport for war:

"As part of the planning process, the Directorate-General for Defense and Space (DG DEFIS) has circulated a survey to key players in the transport sector across the bloc. The questionnaire... asks whether transport assets — including flatbed and medical rail wagons, dual-use ferries, heavy-duty trucks and strategic airlift capacity — could be scaled up during a crisis... [This is] reportedly part of a broader plan that could also see Dutch train drivers deployed to eastern Europe to assist military operations."

This month, the Dutch Ministry of Defense also signed an agreement with the national airline KLM to train its pilots to fly F-35 fighter jets. Certain pilots would have their workloads reduced so they could undergo additional military training. The Netherlands is acquiring six additional F-35 fighter jets, on top of 52 already ordered from US corporation Lockheed Martin.

Plans for war against Russia are inseparably linked to plans for class war against the workers. The NATO powers know there is overwhelming popular opposition to total war with Russia, and to the rising social attacks used to finance rising military spending. In the last several years, the Netherlands in particular have seen mass strike waves and mass protests against the Gaza genocide.

In response, NATO officials try to condition the population to unquestioningly accept the military diktat, demanding workers accept the possibility of a catastrophic war with nuclear-armed Russia.

Last year, as the Netherlands moved to almost double its military spending from 2022 levels to €24 billion a year, Dutch Chief of Defence Gen. Otto Eichelsheim called for “a fundamentally different way of thinking. Instead of meticulously preparing and planning every single mission, in the near future our military, our civilians must simply be ready every day, permanently ready for a large-scale conflict.”

Plans to militarize Rotterdam port are an integral part of this broader imperialist war planning. Last year, citing remarks by NATO officials to Britain’s *Daily Telegraph*, the WSWS noted:

“NATO plans to take over Europe’s port and ground transport infrastructure in order to send US troops arriving in Europe’s Atlantic ports across the continent to Russia. In these transport corridors, which NATO expects would face devastating air attacks, local laws would be suspended.

“The *Telegraph* published a diagram of planned ‘transport corridors’ across Europe. Initial NATO plans call for US troops to land in Rotterdam or Hamburg, in northwestern Europe. However, they can also arrive at the western Italian ports of Genoa or La Spezia; in Athens; in the Norwegian port of Bergen; or in Turkish ports. NATO military officers would take over key road and rail infrastructure to send US troops across Europe to the Russian border.”

At the heart of European militarization is German imperialism’s plan to boost military spending by a staggering €1 trillion. Of this, nearly a half-trillion is dedicated to a Special Fund for war-related infrastructure.

In recent remarks at the Chatham House think-tank in London, NATO Secretary-General and former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte recently called for militarizing infrastructure as a key component of NATO military spending increases. NATO will build more tanks, Rutte said, “But you need bridges which are able to hold the tank. Sometimes you are even not daring with your car to cross the bridge, let alone with the tank.”

The greatest danger in this political situation is that the working class is not fully aware of the extent of the threat posed by imperialist military operations. European

imperialism and its remilitarization plans are tobogganing eyes closed towards a catastrophe echoing those of the 20th century. During World War II, given its strategic location, Rotterdam became the target of a brutal blitzkrieg launched by Hitler in May 1940 as the Nazis conquered the Netherlands. The entire historic centre of the city was incinerated.

Flooding European ports with US-NATO troops and matériel to rush them across Europe to fight Russia in a ground war could easily trigger destruction dwarfing the horrors of World War II.

While European media demonize Russia as a relentless existential menace to Europe, in reality the European Union (EU), let alone the entire NATO alliance, vastly outweigh Russia. With a population of around 450 million and a \$20 trillion economy, the EU has three times the population and 10 times the economic weight of Russia. Were the EU to join the United States in a continental war against Russia, the Russian army could rapidly find itself at a crushing numerical disadvantage.

Under such conditions, Russian military doctrine allows for the use of nuclear weapons to prevent the Russian armed forces from being overwhelmed in a conventional war. Logistical choke points like major ports would be high on the list of potential targets for incineration.

NATO officials have admitted that they would not be able to protect key infrastructure and civilian population in such conditions. “I cannot imagine a situation that you have enough air defence,” NATO Lt. General Alexander Sollfrank told the *Daily Telegraph* last year, adding that major logistics bases “will be attacked and destroyed very early on in a conflict situation.”

This underscores the urgent necessity of alerting the working class to the danger of a further escalation of imperialist war, and mobilizing workers in a socialist, anti-war movement.



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