

Kiev attack and NATO escalation threaten direct war between Russia and Europe

Johannes Stern
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In the early hours of August 28, Russia launched its deadliest air assault on Kiev since July, killing at least 18–21 people, including several children, and wounding dozens more. More than 90 buildings were damaged, among them the offices of the European Union's delegation and the British Council. The Kremlin claimed the attacks targeted military infrastructure, but the strikes ripped through residential districts and a shopping center.

The targeting of EU institutions marks a new stage in the escalation of the war. Moscow is sending a blunt message: it will not accept European troops in Ukraine. Just one day earlier, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had categorically rejected proposals to deploy European “peacekeepers” in Ukraine, contradicting US President Donald Trump’s claim that Vladimir Putin would be willing to accept such a force as part of a negotiated settlement. Peskov warned that NATO’s eastward expansion was one of the root causes of Russia’s 2022 invasion and that European deployments would be treated as hostile acts.

The logic of the war is leading directly toward a military clash between Russia and Europe, threatening the lives of millions and the destruction of the entire continent.

Far from backing down in the wake of Russia’s attacks, European governments seized on them to issue new threats and accelerate the war drive. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer accused Putin of “sabotaging any hopes of peace.” French President Emmanuel Macron denounced Russian “terror and barbarism.” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a 19th sanctions package, pledged new tours of frontline EU states and vowed to turn Ukraine into a “steel porcupine” bristling with Western weapons. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared from aboard the warship *Bayern* that Russia was “testing our readiness” and threatened that Berlin would do “everything” to defend NATO territory.

These statements are not defensive but aggressive. The claim that the European imperialist powers are defending “freedom” and “peace” against Russian aggression is war propaganda. Russia’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine does

not change the fact that NATO systematically provoked the conflict over decades, expanding to Russia’s borders in violation of its promises, encircling Moscow militarily and transforming Ukraine into a forward base of NATO.

The immediate backdrop is the Trump-Putin summit in Alaska on August 15, where the US president signaled a reorientation of American strategy. Trump embraced Putin and made clear that Washington’s priority is the confrontation with China. While prepared to continue arms shipments to Ukraine, Trump insisted that Europe must bear the financial and military burden of the war with Russia.

The European powers reacted with fury. They fear being cut out of a potential Russo-American deal that secures US access to Russian resources while leaving the EU exposed to the full force of the war. Determined to prevent such an outcome, Berlin, Paris and London are escalating their involvement in Ukraine, even discussing the deployment of ground troops cynically labeled as “peacekeepers.”

At the forefront of this offensive are the major European powers—Britain, France but especially German imperialism. On August 25, Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil traveled to Kiev, where he promised President Volodymyr Zelensky at least €9 billion annually in additional military aid and reiterated Berlin’s readiness to provide “security guarantees” to Ukraine. He pledged massive German support for expanding Ukraine’s arms industry, including the production of long-range drones and missiles. Significantly, Klingbeil avoided ruling out the deployment of German ground troops—leaving open the prospect of sending German soldiers to Ukraine and against Russia for the first time since the Second World War.

Klingbeil is simultaneously preparing a war budget that will triple Germany’s defense spending by 2029, from €52 to €153 billion, with long-term plans to raise expenditures to 5 percent of GDP—€225 billion annually. To finance this rearmament, the government has removed military spending from constitutional debt limits, authorizing €1 trillion in new borrowing. While unlimited funds are made available for war, social spending is being gutted. Merz bluntly declared

last week, “The welfare state as we know it is no longer affordable.”

The scale of the militarization is unprecedented since the world wars. The Bundeswehr is set to expand from 181,000 to at least 260,000 soldiers. Compulsory service is being reintroduced. On August 27, the cabinet approved a draft Wehrdienst Modernization Act that will begin registering all young men for military service in 2026. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius stressed that conscription would initially be voluntary but could become mandatory if required. The aim is to rapidly build up the Bundeswehr and a mass reserve force.

At the same cabinet meeting on Wednesday, the government created a National Security Council—in reality, a National War Council—to centralize the coordination of military, intelligence and economic policy. This body, chaired by the chancellor and including ministers, generals, security services, and representatives from industry and think tanks, has sweeping powers to impose decisions without parliamentary oversight. It institutionalizes the turn toward a war economy and an authoritarian state.

All signs point to the transition of German and European capitalism to a war footing. A recent *Financial Times* investigation based on satellite imagery documented a historic boom in arms manufacturing: Europe’s weapons factories have expanded three times faster than peacetime levels since 2022, adding over seven million square meters of new industrial space.

Rheinmetall, Germany’s largest arms producer, plans to boost annual shell production from 70,000 in 2022 to 1.1 million by 2027. A new Rheinmetall facility in Unterlüß, inaugurated this week by Pistorius, Klingbeil and NATO chief Mark Rutte, will become the largest munitions plant in Europe, producing 350,000 artillery shells annually by 2027. Other German and European firms are expanding missile, drone and tank production at breakneck speed, often by converting civilian industries to war purposes, recalling the transformation of industry towards war production in the 1930s.

The ongoing Quadriga 2025 exercises underscore the scale of NATO’s war preparations. Some 8,000 German troops, alongside forces from 13 other nations, are conducting large-scale maneuvers in Germany, Lithuania, Finland and the Baltic Sea. These exercises practice maritime resupply, air and submarine defense, and countering missile strikes—in short, preparations for direct war with Russia.

The Bundeswehr is also permanently stationing a combat brigade in Lithuania, the first long-term deployment of German ground forces abroad since World War II.

Germany’s aggressive course is not defensive but a continuation of its historic war aims: control over Ukraine,

access to Russian raw materials and domination of the Eurasian landmass. These aims were central to the German offensives in both world wars. Today, they are once again being pursued under conditions of capitalist crisis, deepening social inequality and intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries.

The drive to world war is inseparable from the assault on the working class at home. Trillions are being funneled into arms while wages, pensions, health care and education are slashed. To suppress opposition, the ruling class is building up the police, intelligence agencies and authoritarian state structures.

The working class must reject all the reactionary camps in this conflict. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was a reactionary act by a capitalist regime seeking to defend its own predatory interests. His embrace of Trump and appeals to far-right forces across Europe expose the bankruptcy of Russian nationalism. Trump’s maneuvers are not “peace” but a tactical shift to free American resources for war against China. The European powers’ posture as defenders of democracy is the most brazen lie of all: they are, in fact, preparing their own imperialist slaughter.

As the WSWS Editorial Board stressed in its perspective on the Trump-Putin summit:

Neither the maneuvers of Trump, nor the intrigues of the European powers, nor the reactionary calculations of Putin offer a way forward. The struggle against genocide, austerity, dictatorship and war requires the building of a conscious, international socialist movement of the working class, fighting irreconcilably against all the capitalist governments and their political agents.



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