

# European powers arm Ukraine for missile strikes deep into Russia

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This weekend, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pledged to escalate long-range missile strikes against Russia, as European officials continue to arm his regime. Zelensky tweeted: “We will continue our active operations in exactly the way needed for Ukraine’s defence. The forces and resources are prepared. New deep strikes have also been planned.”

Reports also emerged that US officials have approved the sale to Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway of 3,500 long-range cruise missiles, which they will give to Zelensky. The missiles can be fired from F-16 fighter jets that these three countries, together with Belgium, are preparing to give Ukraine. The *New York Times* hailed this deal as “a financial windfall for American weapons producers,” while Germany is preparing to send US-made Patriot missile batteries to Ukraine.

Barely two weeks after Trump met Russian President Vladimir Putin for negotiations in Alaska, talk of a diplomatic settlement is fading, and warring governments are careening eyes closed towards a catastrophic military clash between the major powers.

Zelensky’s post was his response to an August 28 Russian missile strike that hit the British Council and the European Union (EU) delegation in Kiev. Even after this signal that Moscow is prepared to directly strike European targets to keep Europe from bombing Russia, Zelensky and his NATO backers are doubling down on plans for escalation.

In this, NATO is being led not so much by the Trump administration as by the European imperialist powers. On Saturday, Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* summarized current plans for European “security guarantees” to Ukraine. These amount to plans not for the liberation of Ukraine, as argued by supporters of the NATO war, but for a European-US occupation, turning what is left of Ukraine into a NATO-patrolled base aimed against Russia.

According to the *Telegraph*, European countries would

deploy 30,000 troops to Ukraine and enforce a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine, buying US air defense systems to shoot down Russian aircraft. They would also back a Turkish-led “naval mission in the Black Sea aimed at securing commercial shipping routes in and out of Ukraine.” Finally, they would finance the construction of large-scale fortifications along the front lines, to dissuade Russian military action while putting NATO forces in a good position for a future resumption of combat.

Remarkably, a key part of these plans is for Europe to hire US private military contracting firms like Academi (formerly known as Blackwater), infamous for war crimes during US-led NATO occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. “Front-line fortifications and bases nearby could be built by American private military contractors as was done in Iraq and Afghanistan,” the *Telegraph* wrote. These contractors, it added, could also “protect US businesses.”

UK officials told the *Telegraph* this would give credibility to Europe’s threats against Russia. Not only are the European powers struggling to find 30,000 troops to deploy to Ukraine, but they fear Russian military retaliation, the *Telegraph* indicated: The Kremlin might see such a deployment as “too muscular.” Sending US mercenaries to Ukraine, the officials said, “puts American ‘boots’, i.e., American passport holders, on the ground, which is then effectively the deterrent to Putin.”

In reality, the Kremlin is simply reiterating its demands for a peace deal guaranteeing that Ukraine would remain neutral and not host any NATO troops. It has launched repeated air strikes with waves of hundreds of missiles and drones to strike Ukrainian factories, airbases, and ports that are building or transporting missiles NATO could use to bomb Russia. The Kremlin is making clear, moreover, that it is preparing for the war to continue.

“Today we are defining the tasks for the groups of the armed forces that are aimed at the autumn period,”

General Valery Gerasimov, chief of Russia's General Staff, said at a briefing Saturday. "The combined group of troops continues a nonstop offensive along almost the entire front line. The strategic initiative lies entirely with Russian forces."

He reported that a large part of the regions of Luhansk (99.7 percent), Donetsk (79 percent), Kherson (76 percent) and Zaporizhzhya (74 percent) are now in Russian hands. The Kremlin has announced its intention to annex these four regions, while Zelensky has insisted that his regime will not give up any territory, whatever the military situation is. Among NATO military analysts, there is growing discussion of whether Russia will try to annex Kharkov and Odessa, as well. At the current rate of Russian advance, this would require long years of fighting.

There is overwhelming popular disaffection with and opposition to continuing this fratricidal war, which has bled Ukraine white. An August 21-23 poll by Rating found that 82 percent of Ukrainians support negotiations to end the war, while 59 percent want an immediate cessation of hostilities. Last year, a Eurasia Group poll found 91 percent of Americans and 89 percent of West Europeans oppose NATO ground intervention in Ukraine.

It is ever more apparent, on the other hand, that the major capitalist powers neither can nor want to stop the war. Underlying the war is not only the conflict between NATO and Moscow over whether or not Ukraine can serve as a NATO base against Russia, but also deep-seated conflicts inside the NATO alliance itself.

Trump speaks for layers of the American ruling class who seek to reorient US foreign policy towards greater bloodshed in the Middle East and preparing for war with China and who are more interested in trade war with Europe than war with Russia. The European powers have responded by encouraging the defeated Zelensky regime to escalate attacks on Russia and block peace talks by making demands the Kremlin will not accept. And so, even as Europe spends billions on purchasing US military products and services, US-European tensions are mounting.

This weekend, a top White House official speaking anonymously to Axios denounced the European powers for blocking a peace deal: "The Europeans don't get to prolong this war and backdoor unreasonable expectations, while also expecting America to bear the cost. If Europe wants to escalate this war, that will be up to them."

Axios noted growing US conflicts with Europe, as well as divergences among the European powers. "US officials

believe British and French officials are being more constructive. But they complain that other major European countries want the US to bear the full cost of the war," it wrote, citing another top White House official who said: "[S]ome of the Europeans continue to operate in a fairy-tale land. ... We are going to sit back and watch. Let them fight it out for a while and see what happens."

History shows that encouraging Europe's rival powers to fight it out and "seeing what happens" means courting catastrophe. Already, conflicts over access to Russian oil and gas are escalating tensions in the Balkans, reviving the Serbia-Kosovo conflict that exploded into war in the 1990s. After Kosovo signed a military cooperation agreement with Albania and Croatia on March 15, Serbian officials denounced it as a "security threat to the Serbian people and the entire region" and signed a rival military agreement with Hungary on April 1.

Workers must reject all the reactionary camps in this conflict. While Putin's invasion of Ukraine aimed to defend the reactionary interests of Russia's post-Soviet capitalist regime in its relationship with the NATO imperialist powers, these powers are only escalating the bloody imperialist wars they have waged throughout the post-Soviet era. The European powers in particular are preparing to finance their arms build-up with historic attacks on basic social programs that would impoverish the population.

Halting this downward spiral of war and social reaction requires building a conscious, international socialist movement of the working class, irreconcilably opposed to all the capitalist governments and their political agents.



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