

NATO powers escalate confrontation with Russia after drone shootdowns over Poland, heightening risk of direct war

Johannes Stern
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The shooting down of Russian drones over Poland has inaugurated a new stage in NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, threatening to trigger a direct military clash between the nuclear powers of Europe and Moscow.

Although the Kremlin has insisted that the drones did not target Poland and likely strayed accidentally across the border, the European powers are relentlessly propagating the narrative of a "Russian attack" and are seizing upon the incident to intensify their war offensive. They are not merely escalating their rhetoric, but taking concrete military measures that bring the continent closer to catastrophe.

On Friday, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte announced the launch of *Operation Eastern Sentry* to "strengthen defense along the eastern flank." Referring to the drones, he declared: "This is reckless and unacceptable. We cannot allow Russian drones to violate Allied airspace." The operation, he explained, will mobilize resources from Germany, Denmark, France, Britain, and others, including capabilities "specifically oriented toward the challenges posed by drones."

US General Alexus Gryniewich, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, ordered the operation to begin immediately. France has deployed three Rafale jets to Poland for air policing, while Germany announced it is doubling its Eurofighter detachment from two to four aircraft and extending their mission over Polish airspace until at least December 31.

Poland has established a no-fly zone along its entire eastern border—from Slovakia in the south to Lithuania in the north—lasting until December 9, while Latvia has also sealed its airspace along its borders with Belarus and Russia. Simultaneously, Warsaw has closed its border crossings with Belarus, citing the start of the Russian-Belarusian *Zapad* military exercise. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova condemned Poland's "confrontational steps," warning Warsaw to "consider the consequences of such counterproductive measures."

The NATO powers portray both the *Zapad* drills, which have been regularly scheduled for years, and the stray drones as acts of war requiring military retaliation. In reality, they are the aggressors. Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine does nothing to change the fact that NATO systematically provoked the conflict over decades. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it expanded up to Russia's borders, broke its promises, militarily encircled Moscow, and turned Ukraine into a NATO outpost. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the imperialist powers have continuously escalated the conflict and have now deliberately staged the downing of Russian drones in order to take further military measures against Russia and prepare a direct intervention in Ukraine.

In Germany, Defense Ministry and government spokesmen confirmed Berlin's escalation. The Bundeswehr stated Thursday that its "air policing" mission in Poland is being extended to the end of the year and doubled in size, while government spokesman Stefan Kornelius declared that Berlin will also press for a "robust 19th sanctions package" in the EU. Thomas Röwekamp, chair of the Bundestag defense committee, went even further, demanding that NATO attack Russian drones already in Ukrainian airspace: "It must be possible to neutralize drones in Ukraine with the consent of Kyiv if they threaten NATO territory."

The implementation of such plans would mean direct NATO combat operations against Russia inside Ukraine—an act of war. Moscow has repeatedly warned it will not tolerate NATO troops or direct NATO intervention in Ukraine. The logic of this confrontation leads inexorably toward a direct military clash between Russia and Europe, threatening the lives of millions and the survival of the continent.

The drive to war has objective roots. Behind the increasingly aggressive posturing of the imperialist powers lies a toxic mix of political and geostrategic ambitions combined with a profound internal crisis. Just as in the

1930s, the ruling class is responding to the deep crisis of the capitalist system, intensifying great-power rivalries, and growing popular opposition by turning to militarism, fascism, and war.

Above all, German imperialism is re-emerging, eighty years after the end of the Second World War, with its old militaristic and murderous ambitions of acting as an independent great power. In his policy statement ahead of the last NATO summit—where defense spending was raised from 2 to 5 percent of GDP—Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) emphasized that Germany's militarization was not driven by pressure from Trump, but by “our own conviction.” Germany, Merz declared, would “make the Bundeswehr the strongest conventional army in Europe,” in line with its “size, economic strength, and geographic position.”

The new 5 percent target will raise the defense budget from €85 billion today to €225 billion by 2029. To finance this massive upgrade the government—with the support of all establishment parties including the Greens and the Left Party—has exempted military spending from the constitutional debt brake and approved €1 trillion in new debt. Together with the “special fund” of €100 billion established in 2022, this amounts to a rearmament program unparalleled since the Nazi era.

According to media reports, the 2026 draft budget shows the government planning arms purchases worth more than €350 billion through 2041. Already this year, €8.2 billion is being spent on procurement, with €22.3 billion earmarked for 2026. Between 2027 and 2041, so-called “commitment appropriations” of around €325 billion are planned. Adding in the expenditures for 2025 and 2026, the total reaches a staggering €355 billion.

These astronomical sums underscore the scale of German rearmament, comparable only to the Wehrmacht build-up under the Nazis on the eve of World War II. While millions face rising prices, stagnant wages, and cuts to social services, hundreds of billions are being funneled into new tanks, missiles, and bombs. As then, such a reckless program can only be enforced through dictatorial measures at home, and it serves the direct preparation of new imperialist wars of aggression—first and foremost against Russia.

Following the reintroduction of the draft and the creation of a National Security Council in August, outgoing Army Inspector Alfons Mais has called for a massive expansion of personnel to make the Bundeswehr “fit for war.” Only with significantly more troops, he argued, could Germany meet NATO's future requirements and be ready for a possible confrontation with Russia.

According to an internal document obtained by Reuters, Mais is demanding around 100,000 additional active

soldiers. By 2029 alone, some 45,000 new recruits are to be added. By 2035, another 45,000 are to follow, to meet the targets set at the NATO summit in The Hague this June while also building “reserves for a war of attrition.” At least 10,000 of the additional troops would be assigned to territorial defense.

With these plans, the German Army is openly acknowledging it is preparing for a large-scale, protracted war against Russia. While austerity measures and social cuts are being rammed through at home, the recruitment of hundreds of thousands of young people and working-class youth for new imperialist slaughter is being mapped out.

The reckless escalation confirms the urgency of the analysis advanced in the recent WSWS perspective on the drone incident in Poland:

Since US President Trump met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska, the European powers have been waiting for such an opportunity. They concluded from the Alaska summit that the US can no longer be relied upon and are taking increasingly aggressive action against Russia. They have massively increased their financial and military support for Ukraine, are encouraging President Zelensky to attack targets deep inside Russia and are planning to send their own troops to Ukraine. In doing so, they are moving ever closer to a catastrophe that threatens the survival of humanity.

Neither the threatening maneuvers of Trump, the military intrigues of the European powers, nor the reactionary calculations of Putin offer a way out this catastrophe. The fight against genocide, austerity, dictatorship, and war requires the building of a conscious international socialist movement of the working class, uniting across borders against all capitalist governments and their political agents.



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