

# Escalation in the Baltics: NATO exploits alleged airspace violation by Russian jets for new war escalation

**Johannes Stern**  
**22 September 2025**

Last Friday, the Estonian Defense Ministry reported that three Russian MiG-31 fighter jets had entered Estonian airspace for several minutes. While the government in Tallinn and NATO allies immediately branded the incident a “provocation” by Moscow, the Kremlin firmly rejected this account. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, there had been no border violation. The aircraft were on a transfer flight from a base in northwestern Russia to the Kaliningrad exclave and had been flying “in strict conformity with international rules governing airspace with no violation of the borders of other states as is confirmed by independent checks.”

In fact, even the map published by the Estonian military indicates that the jets flew parallel to the border and were on a transit route. Nevertheless, the incident is being exaggerated by European governments and the mainstream media to further escalate the confrontation with Russia.

Today, Tuesday, the NATO Council is meeting at Estonia’s request under Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty. These consultations are convened when a member state feels its security is threatened. In the 76-year history of the alliance, this mechanism has only rarely been invoked—most recently just a few days ago by Poland after more than 20 Russian drones crossed its airspace.

That there are now two such meetings within one week is a clear expression of the acute situation. Article 4 is regarded as the precursor to Article 5, which provides for the alliance case and thus the entry into war of all NATO states.

Already on Monday, representatives of the Western powers used the incident at the UN Security Council to issue martial threats. New US Ambassador Mike Waltz declared: “The United States and its allies will defend every inch of NATO territory.”

In Germany and other NATO states, politicians are outbidding each other with aggressive demands. CDU foreign policy spokesman Jürgen Hardt demanded a “clear stop sign” for Moscow: Every military border violation must be “answered with military means—even up to the shooting down of Russian fighter jets over NATO territory.” Similar tones came from Lithuanian Defense Minister Dovilė Šakalienė and Czech President Petr Pavel.

The Greens are pushing for a coordinated European strategy. “Europe needs unity on when and how to respond step by step if something like this happens again,” said security policy spokeswoman Sara Nanni.

SPD politicians are calling for “restraint” but at the same time demanding a massive expansion of air defense. Siemtje Möller, deputy parliamentary group chair, warned that existing military capabilities were insufficient to effectively protect the eastern flank.

With such war propaganda and anti-Russian agitation, the population is to be gradually accustomed to the idea that the shooting down of Russian aircraft in European airspace—and thus a direct entry into the war—is an “option.”

NATO has already taken concrete measures. With Operation Eastern Sentry, the alliance is strengthening its presence in the air, at sea and on land along the eastern flank. Italian F-35 jets carried out the interception of the Russian MiG-31s on Friday. Germany has stationed a second quick reaction alert unit in Rostock-Laage; France has deployed Rafale fighters to Poland; and Denmark has sent a frigate.

Since the Baltic states have no air forces of their own, so-called NATO air policing has been carried out for years by rotating members. It is now to be transformed into a “comprehensive integrated defense system.” NATO

Supreme Commander Alexus Grynkevich stated that the goal was to “close gaps in our defense against a concrete threat.”

Germany is playing a key role in the escalation. Inspector General Carsten Breuer announced that the Bundeswehr would make so-called loitering munitions—kamikaze drones—operational by the end of this year. “In the end, it will have to come down to drones being used against drones,” he declared. He is vigorously pushing the rearmament for a future drone war.

At the same time, the Bundeswehr is preparing for a scenario that would massively increase mass casualties at the front in Ukraine and recall the bloody battles of the world wars. Surgeon General Ralf Hoffmann told Reuters that in the event of a war with Russia, Germany would have to expect up to 1,000 wounded soldiers per day. The medical service is being massively expanded, hospital trains and buses are being prepared, and German hospitals are to keep 15,000 beds available for soldiers.

These statements alone make clear how concrete the war preparations already are.

Berlin’s aggressive role is tied to a long and criminal tradition. Already in the First and Second World Wars, control over Ukraine and the conquest of Russia played a central role in the expansion plans of German imperialism. Today this predatory strategy is being repeated, which, with Hitler’s war of extermination against the Soviet Union, led to some of the greatest crimes in human history—now under the guise of “defense” and “democracy.”

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is reactionary and nationalist. But it does not change the fact that NATO systematically provoked the conflict: through eastward expansion after 1991, the encirclement of Moscow with military bases, the US- and EU-backed coup in Kiev in 2014, and the transformation of Ukraine into a NATO outpost. Since then, the Western powers have continuously driven escalation forward.

European escalation policy is also a reaction to the geostrategic reorientation of the United States. After the Trump-Putin summit in Alaska, much points to Washington seeking a deal with Moscow over resources in order to concentrate its forces on confrontation with China. Europe, meanwhile, is to bear the main burden of the war against Russia.

This increases the drive among the leading EU powers, above all, Germany, to act militarily more independently and to ramp up arms production on a historic scale.

The new budget currently under debate in the Bundestag

already foresees military spending of €128 billion for the coming year. By 2029 it is to rise to €153 billion and then be financed exclusively from the regular budget. With the war credits of 1 trillion euros—supported by all Bundestag parties, including the Left Party and the Greens—the entire country is to be made “fit for war.”

While the ruling class seeks to enforce its imperialist interests through fascism and war, resistance is growing in the working class. In France, hundreds of thousands demonstrated and went on strike against Macron’s war and austerity budget last week. In Italy on Monday, also hundreds of thousands took to the streets against Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

Workers sense that war policy is inseparably linked to social cuts, dictatorship and fascism. The enormous armaments expenditures are being paid for directly through cuts in healthcare, education, pensions and wages.

The latest incidents—alleged airspace violations by drones or fighter jets—are being deliberately instrumentalized by NATO to drive escalation forward. With the second Article 4 consultation within just a few days and the debate about shooting down Russian jets, Europe stands on the brink of a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia—a scenario that could inevitably lead to a nuclear world war.

The working class must not stand idly by in the face of this madness. The fight against war, militarism and austerity requires the building of an international socialist movement that overthrows the imperialist governments and reorganizes society on the basis of social equality and international solidarity. Only in this way can the looming catastrophe be averted.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:  
**wsws.org/contact**