German government provokes escalation of Ukraine war

Peter Schwarz
2 September 2026

The German government's accusation that Russia carried out a failed terrorist attack at Leipzig Airport on August 4 is a political provocation. Its aim is to further escalate the war in Ukraine, rally the other European powers behind the war effort and prepare public opinion for a direct war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

It is telling that the German government announced its latest escalation against Russia on September 1 of all days—the day Hitler launched World War II. The Nazis staged a fake attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz (now Gliwice) to justify the invasion of Poland. "We have been returning fire since 5:45 a.m.!" Hitler told the Reichstag.

The German government is reverting to the same methods, as it prepares to cross the threshold from a proxy war to an open war against Russia. This is what Federal Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt meant when he said, "We are not at war, but we are the daily target of hybrid warfare."

The punitive measures imposed by the government—the closure of the Russian Consulate General in Bonn and the Russian House in Berlin, stricter entry requirements for Russians, and pressure on the so-called "shadow fleet"—all point in the same direction. The severing of diplomatic and cultural ties is a step toward war. The government fully expects Russia to respond by closing the Goethe Institute in Moscow and the German consulate in Saint Petersburg.

The accusations against Russia were carefully timed. On Sunday, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced that an official "attribution of the Leipzig attack" would soon be made, and threatened: "They will pay for this." On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul and Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt issued a joint press statement holding Russia responsible for the attack.

Wadephul then flew to Ireland for a meeting of EU foreign ministers to rally them behind the more aggressive stance against Russia. By the time he addressed the press, EU defence ministers had already met in Ireland and likewise decided to escalate the war against Russia.

Dobrindt and Wadephul did not present a single piece of credible evidence for Russia's alleged involvement. Dobrindt spoke only in general terms of police and intelligence findings that the "means of commission"—the drone's configuration, components, explosives and detonator technology—matched those of other Russian hybrid operations. He claimed that the technology was "professional" and the planning effort "considerable," contradicting his own statement that the act had been carried out by "low-level agents," i.e., amateurs.

The discovery of the drone at Leipzig Airport—which, in addition to civilian traffic, also serves as a hub for cargo and weapons shipments—raises numerous questions.

A bus driver found the small drone on the ground late on the night of August 4, near an Antonov heavy-lift aircraft belonging to the Ukrainian airline of the same name, which has operated out of Leipzig since the war began. Investigators later found 600 grams of high explosives nearby, which had allegedly come loose from the drone. There was no explosion or damage.

Even then, many were calling for Russia to be held responsible for the "hybrid attack." But there were also suspicions, voiced in circles close to the security services, that it was a provocation by Ukraine or other interested parties. Nothing that Dobrindt and Wadephul have now announced has refuted them.

Russia flatly rejected the German allegations. On the sidelines of a summit with China and India in Bishkek, President Putin called the punitive measures a "serious mistake" and accused the German government of fabricating evidence after the drone incident in order to level accusations against Moscow. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Berlin of deliberately pursuing a "path of escalation."

The German government's reaction to the discovery of the drone in Leipzig stands in stark contrast to its response to the largest terrorist attack on infrastructure in recent memory—the bombing of the Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2022. Although the Ukrainian perpetrators have since been identified and the trail leads to the then-commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian army, Valery Zaluzhny, the German government has never protested, let alone imposed punitive measures on Kiev. Its stance on terrorist attacks, whether real or fictitious, is determined not by facts but by its imperialist interests.

The latest provocation against Russia cannot be understood in isolation from the global situation. The deep contradictions of world capitalism are once again driving all imperialist powers

© World Socialist Web Site

toward a violent redivision of the world.

World war is already "underway, developing in the manner of a metastatic process," David North explained in his report to the Ninth Party Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US). "It is spreading globally as a chronic and expanding condition, colonizing new regions, fusing previously separate conflicts, and progressively transforming the world economy and every national state in preparation for the general conflagration toward which it tends."

As Europe's leading economic power, Germany already played a particularly aggressive role in World War I. Hemmed in at the centre of a crowded Europe, lacking a large colonial empire and outmatched by the British fleet, it sought to dominate Europe and expand eastward. The war plans against France and Russia had lain ready in the desk drawers of generals, industrialists and statesmen for years when the war began in 1914.

All that remained was to find a plausible pretext. It was supplied by playing up the assassination of the Austrian heir to the throne by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo and the blank check that Berlin issued to Austria for war against Serbia. The German government knew that Russia would respond with a general mobilisation and could thus be portrayed as the aggressor.

In World War II, German imperialism sought revenge for its defeat in the First World War by mobilizing every resource of society for a war in which it committed crimes on an unimaginable scale—including the systematic murder of 27 million Soviet citizens and 6 million Jews. To do so, it required the Nazi dictatorship, which crushed the workers' movement, converted all of industry to war production and extinguished the last moral scruples.

German imperialism today finds itself in a situation much like that of the first half of the 20th century. During the Cold War, it exploited the European single market and reaped profits worldwide in the slipstream of the United States. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that changed. The German economy benefited more than any other from the eastward expansion of the European Union and NATO, but when NATO reached for Ukraine and Georgia as well, it provoked a defensive reaction from Moscow. The Putin regime, unable to appeal to the working masses, responded with a war that has now lasted four-and-a-half years and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

From the very beginning, Germany played a leading role in the escalation of the conflict. In 2014, together with the US, it organised the violent overthrow of the government in Kiev, which brought a pro-Western regime to power; it then helped rebuild the Ukrainian army; and today it is the largest financial backer and a major arms supplier of the Zelensky regime, with which it works closely.

Berlin is striving to hold the European ranks together. It is working closely with the British government, which is also providing massive military and financial support to Ukraine. Under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen—who, like German Chancellor Merz, is a member of the Christian Democratic Union—the European Commission has massively expanded its powers. It coordinates the European defence industry, issues its own bonds on capital markets, and uses the proceeds to finance a 90-billion-euro loan for Ukraine.

Berlin and Brussels are also striving to keep the US, as the leading NATO power, on board. But Trump's punitive tariffs, his claim to Greenland and his unilateral dealings with Moscow have sharply raised tensions. Trump is not the cause of this, but only the sharpest expression of imperialist contradictions that have long been building up.

Every meeting between Trump and Putin is viewed with suspicion in Berlin and Brussels. The more transatlantic tensions grow, the more aggressively Berlin pursues the conflict with Moscow. It has staked its fate on victory over Russia and will accept no outcome to the escalating war short of Russia's surrender. Those in power are knowingly accepting the risk of Europe's nuclear annihilation.

Resistance to the war can come only from the working class, which pays for it in social cuts, rising prices, lost jobs and conscription. Uniting workers internationally and winning them to a socialist program that links the struggle against war, social inequality and dictatorship with the struggle against their root cause—capitalism—is the goal of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk has been sentenced in Ukraine to 15 years in prison on charges of high treason because he advocates ending the war through the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian working class. Syrotiuk is an opponent of the Putin regime. But the Ukrainian government, which honours Nazi collaborators and mass murderers from World War II as heroes, cannot tolerate any socialist opposition to its war.

The fight to free Bogdan is a critical struggle in the fight against imperialist war. We urge all readers of the WSWS to take up this cause: Sign the petition for his release at wsws.org/freebogdan, send letters of protest demanding his freedom to the Ukrainian courts at inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua and inbox@mka.court.gov.ua, with a copy to freebogdan@wsws.org, and raise his case in your workplace, school and union.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site