

Promoting unsubstantiated allegations of Russian “shadow war,” New York Times agitates for escalation of US-NATO war against Russia

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The *New York Times* on Friday published a lengthy article accusing Russia of waging a “shadow war” against the European NATO powers and arguing for military escalation by NATO ranging from cyberattacks on the Moscow subway to shooting down Russian aircraft over Ukraine. The article, by the *Times*’ chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe, Steven Erlanger, does not substantiate a single one of the Russian attacks it alleges.

The article ran under the headline “As Putin Wages Shadow War, Europe Looks for a Way to Hit Back.” Its first sentence asserts as fact that “Russia is escalating its campaign of sabotage in NATO countries,” and the subheadline asks, “But how should Europe retaliate? And how hard?”

Erlanger describes an invented “war” by Russia against the NATO powers in which his own article does not cite any deaths or injuries, and for which he presents no evidence that Russia is responsible. What officials “fear most,” he writes, is that one incident might someday cause “a significant loss of life.”

A “war” without dead and without wounded is called a propaganda campaign. Its purpose is to prepare the public for a direct war against Russia, a nuclear-armed state.

Erlanger’s case for the existence of a “shadow war” rests on a list of “recent incidents directly attributed to Russia or thought ordered by Moscow”: “strikes on railroad infrastructure in Poland, a Russian frigate’s firing flares at a Danish helicopter, sabotage at factories, incursions by Russian reconnaissance drones and plots to kill executives of European armaments companies.”

In the next paragraph he concedes that “many episodes are hard to pin on Russia.” This is an understatement.

The Polish “strikes” come down to two incidents in

November 2025. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk claimed in parliament on November 18 that a military explosive had gone off on November 15 under a freight train near the village of Mika; by his own account, the train did not derail and the driver did not notice.

In the second, near Puławy on November 16, a passenger train braked hard under a damaged overhead line; windows in one car broke and no one was hurt. Tusk alleged that two Ukrainians charged in the case worked for Russian intelligence, but no evidence that Russia directed the attacks has been made public.

Polish prosecutors said Thursday they had closed their investigation into the drones that crossed into Poland in September 2025 without identifying a perpetrator.

Weeks earlier, in a separate case, they had found that the worst damage, to a house in the village of Wiryki, was done by a missile from a NATO warplane.

The one incident Erlanger presents as proven is the case of a drone discovered at the Leipzig-Halle airport on the evening of August 4 this year, which he says Berlin “directly attributed to Moscow.” Two days later Germany’s federal prosecutor said it carried “professional explosives and a detonator.”

No one was hurt by the drone, and no one has been arrested. Erlanger treats the German allegation as fact: The drone, he writes, “marked a shift, both for Russian risk-taking and for Germany’s willingness to point the finger at Moscow.”

Erlanger’s list omits the September 2022 bombing of the Nord Stream pipelines, because its authorship is now on the record. The *Times* pointed to Russia within a day. On June 30 of this year, Germany’s federal prosecutor charged a Ukrainian army officer with planning the attack

“acting by order of Ukrainian state agencies.”

Erlanger’s catalog of unproven allegations is the pretext for proposals to attack Russia directly. “Analysts suggested, for instance, that cyber capabilities could be used to shut down a Russian town or the Moscow subway as a warning message,” he writes, without naming the analysts. A cyberattack on the Moscow subway would amount to an attack on civilians.

Erlanger also floats “forward air defense, including over Ukrainian territory, to shoot down threats heading toward NATO territory,” a proposal he credits to Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski. In reality, this would be a no-fly zone over Ukraine, enforced by NATO warplanes and missile batteries and involving the shooting down of Russian aircraft by NATO forces—that is, a shooting war.

On March 4, 2022, when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Republican war hawks demanded a no-fly zone, then-NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned that it would mean sending NATO fighter planes into Ukrainian airspace and “shooting down Russian planes.” Doing so, he said, “could end in a full-fledged war in Europe.”

The aim of the campaign to promote the existence of a “shadow war” is to create the conditions by means of which the NATO powers can escalate the war with Russia without any public debate. Linas Kojala of the Geopolitics and Security Studies Center, a Lithuanian research group, told the *Times* that “governments would need to have funding and legal authority prepared in advance, so the response is not delayed by a new political debate after every incident.”

Ivo Daalder, a former US ambassador to NATO, said Europe “needs a menu, not another meeting.”

Erlanger writes that preparing responses in advance “presumes collective European agreement on responses to unpredictable attacks that could quickly lead to war.” Decisions that could bring Europe into war with a nuclear-armed power would be approved beforehand, without “a new political debate” each time, and set off by incidents that are, as Erlanger concedes, often “hard to pin on Russia.”

What the *Times* presents as a way for the NATO powers to “hit back” against unproven attacks would be a war of aggression. The *Times* inverts the real relationship between the imperialist powers and Russia, their intended target for carve-up and subjugation.

For years, weapons funded, targeted and in many cases directly provided by the NATO powers have struck cities across Russia.

Overnight on September 19-20, Ukraine carried out what Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin called the largest drone attack on the capital to date, damaging an oil refinery. On October 4, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz traveled to Kiev for a deal to jointly develop and produce weapons able to reach more than 1,000 kilometers into Russia.

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine was a bankrupt and reactionary adventure, the Russian capitalist oligarchy’s response to the NATO campaign against it.

At a news conference in Moscow on February 7, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that if Ukraine joined NATO and tried to retake Crimea by force, “the European countries will automatically get drawn into a military conflict with Russia”—an outcome that, by his own account, the invasion was meant to prevent. It instead allowed the imperialist powers to present their war against Russia as “self-defense.”

The *Times* has played this role before. On September 8, 2002, it reported on its front page, on the word of American officials, that Iraq was seeking aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges. Vice President Dick Cheney cited the story on television that morning. Today its reports of a Russian “shadow war” serve the same purpose.

The measures the *Times* is promoting—shutting down the Moscow subway, NATO warplanes over Ukraine, war decisions approved in advance—are steps toward a war between nuclear-armed powers, with potentially horrific consequences for all of humanity.



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