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Will NATO member states individually or collectively go to war against Russia?

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Spokesman for the German government Steffen Hebestreit said his country opposed the deployment of NATO's anti-missile system on Ukrainian territory.

The German point of view matches that of Secretary General of the Alliance Jens Stoltenberg who said in an interview with *The Economist*: "The time has come for allies to reflect on whether they should lift some of the restrictions on the use of weapons given to Ukraine (...) Especially now, when a lot of fighting is taking place in Kharkov, near the border, denying Ukraine the ability to use these weapons against legitimate military targets on Russian territory makes it very difficult to defend it."

He also said: "We have no intention of sending NATO ground troops to Ukraine because our objective... is twofold: to support Ukraine as we do, but also to ensure that it does not escalate into a full-scale conflict"

According to the *New York Times*, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken would be in favor of this second proposal. Steffen Hebestreit, for his part, evaded journalists' questions on this subject.

☞ Extending the protection of the Atlantic anti-missile shield to Ukrainian territory would mean going to war collectively against Russia. But allowing Ukraine to attack Russia with weapons supplied by NATO member states would mean their individual entry into war against Russia.

For his part, Italy's deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini commented: "This gentleman [Jens Stoltenberg] is dangerous because talking about World War III, Western weapons capable of striking and killing inside Russia, seems to me very, very dangerous and reckless (...) NATO cannot force us to kill in Russia, nor can anyone force us to send Italian soldiers to fight or die in Ukraine."

Russian president Vladimir Putin told reporters: "This constant escalation can lead to serious consequences. If these serious consequences occur in Europe, how will the United States behave, given our parity in the field of strategic weapons? It's hard to say. Do they want a world conflict?". "Let them [European NATO member states] remember that their territory is small and their population is dense," he continued.

Russian senator Dmitry Rogozin, former director of Roscosmos, directly warned Washington: "We are not only on the threshold, but already on the edge, beyond which, if the enemy is not stopped in such actions, an irreversible collapse of the strategic security of the nuclear powers will begin."

In all likelihood, Poland is expected to be the first NATO member state to allow Ukraine to strike Russia with the weapons it has supplied. Moscow would then have to retaliate by striking at least the NATO logistics center on Polish territory in Rzeszów. It will be up to the other NATO member states to consider whether or not to activate Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and start World War III.

From a strategic point of view, the deployment of US medium-range missiles on the borders of Russia and China now exposes them to this eventuality. That is why Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced that the two countries reached a joint defense agreement during President Vladimir Putin's last visit to Beijing. In addition, Russia is currently conducting simulations with Belarus of the use of tactical (not strategic) nuclear weapons.