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NATO has Declared War on Russia: Will it succeed?

Even though no NATO country has come under Russian attack, the former has still declared war on Russia.



When British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer met US President Joe Biden in the White House on the 13th of September, what they discussed – and probably decided – was the use of long-range missiles to hit targets inside Russia. Although they officially said that no formal decision had been made, it is quite evident, at least to Russian authorities, that the decision has already been made and communicated to Ukraine. Long-range missiles, like all other weapon systems worth more than US\$100 billion supplied thus far, are on their way and will be available for active deployment by the end of 2024. In fact, the UK has already supplied a long-range air-launched cruise missile, Storm Shadow, to Ukraine. If they are used, this will surely be the biggest military escalation in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Besides the fact that these missiles will intensify the war, the chances of whether NATO will be able to achieve its purposes remain grim for several reasons.

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Protracted Conflict

Without going into the nitty-gritty of the actual missile systems to be supplied and the damage they could, or couldn't cause, to Russia, there is little denying that the Western resort to attacks inside Russia indicates the failure of its military strategy thus far to militarily – and economically – defeat Russia. The question, however, is: can European countries afford a prolonged conflict?

Germany, which was until recently a major supplier of weapons to Ukraine, has already decided to halve its support. The decision has been taken regardless of the fact that the possible return of Donald Trump could itself see a drastic cut in US military aid to Ukraine. Such a scenario shows multiple situations underpinning Europe's position in the conflict.

First, Germany does not care who ends up occupying the White House in November. Berlin does not simply want to fully empty its arsenal and spend more than it wants to on defence. Instead, Germany is now “hoping” that Ukraine will be able to fund itself via loans, i.e., financial instruments that Europe has supplied to Kyiv and that will bring increasing returns to Europe. In other words, Europe's leading economy is now switching from security to profit modern vis-à-vis the military conflict.

Reports also indicate that Germany's defence budget will also fall short of expected increments. As against the defence minister's request for a 6.7 billion euro increase in defence spending, Germany is likely to add only 1.3 billion euros. Again, this is an indication of the overall economic situation of the country, which has been grappling with inflation for the past three years.

Germany's partial withdrawal could catalyse a general, Europe-wide withdrawal from the so-called “war effort”, complicating Washington's and London's plans to drag the conflict. Its reason is the economy. The time-tested ‘saviour’ of the European economy, Mario Draghi, the former prime minister of Italy, believes that the European economy immediately needs a massive financial injection of US\$883 billion annually to escape oblivion. In a 400-page-long report released on the 9th of September, Mario presented what can basically be called Europe's “Whatever It Takes” moment. Will Europe be able to mobilize this much money and continue to fund the war on Russia simultaneously? This would require a miracle, which

is not forthcoming. Therefore, full measures are hardly possible or even take place meaningfully.

Half Heartedness

Despite more than two and half years since the beginning of Russia's Special Military Operations in Ukraine, NATO is still grappling with its spending problem. The June 2024 NATO report shows that 8 member states, including Italy and Canada, are still underspending. Now, besides the fact that it could become a major transatlantic issue if Donald Trump wins the election, it also shows that several NATO countries are not necessarily prioritising this issue in ways that Washington would want it to. Still, it also means that Washington will continue to be the major supplier of weapons systems to Ukraine. The question, however, is: how long can Washington continue to do this without risking loss of stockpiles elsewhere, including in the Pacific theatre?

Biden is unconcerned about such outcomes, primarily because he personally has nothing to lose in a political sense. Therefore, he might be willing to become a bit reckless. As far as Europe is concerned, it could end up bearing the brunt of Russian counterattacks. Russian officials have already begun to hint at possibilities of dramatic developments.

Russian Response

What will further complicate transatlantic calculations would be the nature of the Russian response to this escalation, i.e., long-range European missiles hitting targets inside Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has already said that any use of western long-range missiles to strike Russia "will mean that NATO countries, the United States, and European countries are parties to the war in Ukraine. This will mean their direct involvement in the conflict, and it will clearly change the very essence, the very nature of the conflict dramatically".

Other Russian officials have also warned of Russia's right to use its nuclear arsenal in the wake of NATO's direct attacks inside Russia. If push comes to shove, Europe will face the music first and foremost. There is, thus, some food for thought for countries in Europe still prioritising the conflict that only aims to expand NATO and push Russia into oblivion.

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