

Polish Brinkmanship: De Facto Leader Settling Score with Putin

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In a highly symbolic move expressing solidarity with Ukraine, the prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia traveled together to the embattled Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 15.

The three leaders took hours-long train trip on their journey from the west Ukrainian city of Lviv to the capital Kyiv, allegedly “endangering their lives” due to security risks involved in traveling within a war zone, though there was no risk to their lives as such because they had requested prior permission for the official visit from the Kremlin, which was graciously granted keeping in view diplomatic conventions.

Image on the right: Jarosław Kaczyński speaking during the inauguration of a monument to his brother Lech Kaczyński (November 2018, Warsaw) (Licensed under CC BY 2.0)



Accompanying the trio of premiers was a “special guest” of the Ukraine government, Jaroslaw Kaczynski—the deputy prime minister of Poland, the head of Law and Justice (PiS) Party to which the president and prime minister of Poland belong and the infamous “puppet

master” who hires and fires government executives and ministers on a whim.

Jaroslaw Kaczynski is the twin brother of the late President Lech Kaczynski, who died in a plane crash at Smolensk, Russia, in 2010 along with 95 other Poles, among them political and military leaders, as they traveled to commemorate the Katyn massacre that occurred during the Second World War.

Subsequent Polish and international investigations led by independent observers conclusively determined that the crash-landing was an accident caused by fog and pilot error. Still, Kaczynski, 72, has [long suspected](#) [1] that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a role in provoking the accident, and is harboring a personal grudge against the Russian president.

Speaking alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at Kyiv, Kaczynski said:

“I think that it is necessary to have a peace mission—NATO, possibly some wider international structure—but a mission that will be able to defend itself, which will operate on Ukrainian territory.”

Kaczynski’s escalatory rhetoric isn’t merely a verbal threat, as a [secret plan](#) [2] for a “peacekeeping mission” involving 10,000 NATO troops from the member states surreptitiously occupying Lviv and the rest of towns in western Ukraine and imposing a limited no-fly zone is allegedly being prepared by the Polish government that could potentially trigger an all-out war between Russia and the transatlantic military alliance.

The plan is seemingly on hiatus due to a disagreement between figurehead Polish President Andrzej Duda and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, as Duda wanted Washington’s approval before going ahead, whereas Kaczynski appeared keen to obtain political mileage from the Ukraine crisis and was also desperate for settling a personal score with Putin, even if his impulsive and capricious attitude risked triggering a catastrophic Third World War.

In another diplomatic fiasco involving Kaczynski’s shady hand in the Polish policymaking, Secretary of State Tony Blinken suggested early this month that Poland could hand over its entire fleet of 28 Soviet-era MiG-29s to Ukraine, and in return, the United States government would “backfill” the Polish Air Force with American F-16s.

“We are looking actively now at the question of airplanes that Poland may provide to Ukraine, and looking at how we might be able to backfill it should Poland decide to supply those planes,” Blinken told a briefing in Chisinau on March 6.

The transfer might have been possible if the deal was kept under wraps, but that became impossible after Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign affairs and security policy chief, declared unequivocally to reporters on Feb. 27 that the bloc would provide Ukraine with fighter jets.

The Ukraine government heard the proposal and ran with it, producing infographics claiming they were about to receive 70 used Russian fighter jets from Poland, Slovakia and Bulgaria. A Ukrainian government official [told Politico](#) [3] that Ukrainian pilots had even traveled to Poland to wrap up the deal and bring the planes back over the border.

Upon getting wind of the illicit deal, Russian defense spokesman Igor Konashenkov issued a stark warning that any attempt by an outside power to facilitate a no-fly zone over Ukraine, including providing aircraft to Kyiv, would be considered a belligerent in the war and treated

accordingly.

Hours after the Russian warning, the Polish Foreign Ministry issued an emphatic denial, saying providing aircraft to Ukraine was out of question as the MiG-29 fleet constituted the backbone of the Polish Air Force.

The deal was categorically scuttled on March 3 by Polish President Andrzej Duda:

“We are not sending any jets to Ukraine because that would open military inference in the Ukrainian conflict. We are not joining that conflict. NATO is not party to that conflict,” [Duda said](#) [4].

In a bizarre turn of events overriding its own president’s categorical statement, the Polish government announced on March 8 that it was ready to transfer the aircraft to the Ramstein Air Base in Germany at the disposal of the United States which could then hand them over to Ukraine.

Clearly, there was a disagreement between Poland’s figurehead President Duda and de facto leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski over the aircraft transfer deal, too. Ultimately, Kaczynski prevailed and the Polish government announced it was ready to transfer the aircraft to Ukraine via an intermediary.

The denouement of the comedy of errors, however, came a day later on March 9, after the United States, while occupying a high moral ground, unequivocally rejected the “preposterous” Polish offer, initially made on Warsaw’s behalf by none other than the EU’s foreign affairs head and the US secretary of state.

The prospect of flying combat aircraft from NATO territory into the war zone “raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance,” the Pentagon sanctimoniously revealed on March 9. “It is simply not clear to us that there is a substantive rationale for it,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby dignifiedly added.

The only conclusion that could be drawn from the reluctant Polish offer of transferring its entire fleet of MiG-29s to Ramstein at the disposal of the United States is that it was simply a humbug designed to provide face-saving to its NATO patron while it was already decided behind the scenes that Washington would spurn Poland’s nominal offer.

Nonetheless, CNN [reported March 6](#) [5] Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley visited a week before an undisclosed airfield near the Ukraine border that has become a hub for shipping weapons. The airport’s location remains a secret to protect the shipments of weapons, including anti-aircraft and anti-armor missiles, into Ukraine. Although the report didn’t name the location, the airfield was likely in Poland along Ukraine’s border.

“US European Command (EUCOM) is at the heart of the massive shipment operation, using its liaison network with allies and partners to coordinate ‘in real time’ to send materials into Ukraine, a Defense official said. EUCOM is also coordinating with other countries, including the United Kingdom, in terms of the delivery process ‘to ensure that we are using our resources to maximum efficiency to support the Ukrainians in an organized way,’ the official added.”

Besides deploying 15,000 additional troops in Eastern Europe last month, total number of

US troops in Europe is now expected to reach 100,000.

“We have 130 jets at high alert. Over 200 ships from the high north to the Mediterranean, and thousands of additional troops in the region,” NATO Secretary General Jens [Stoltenberg told CNN](#) [6].

A spokesman for US European Command told CNN the United States was sending two Patriot missile batteries to Poland, and was also considering deploying THAAD air defense system, a more advanced system equivalent in capabilities to Russia’s S-400 air defense system.

Famous for hosting CIA’s black sites where alleged al-Qaeda operatives were water-boarded and tortured before being sent to Guantanamo Bay in the early years of the war on terror, in Poland alone the US military footprint now exceeds 10,000 troops as the majority of 15,000 troops sent to Europe last month went to Poland to join the 4,000 US troops already stationed there.

The airfields and training camps in the border regions of Poland have become a hub for transporting lethal weapons and heavily armed militants to Lviv in west Ukraine, who then travel to the battlefields in Kyiv and east Ukraine.

President Biden arrived in Poland Friday and spoke to American troops bolstering NATO’s eastern flank. Biden shared a meal with soldiers from the US Army’s 82nd Airborne Division stationed in southeastern Polish city Rzeszow, which has been acting as a staging area for NATO’s military assistance to Ukraine while also serving as a waypoint for refugees fleeing the violence.

Ahead of the NATO summit attended by President Biden Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced the transatlantic military alliance would double the number of battlegroups it had deployed in Eastern Europe.

“The first step is the deployment of four new NATO battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, along with our existing forces in the Baltic countries and Poland,” Stoltenberg said. “This means that we will have eight multinational NATO battlegroups all along the eastern flank, from the Baltic to the Black Sea.”

NATO [issued a statement](#) [7] after Thursday’s emergency summit attended by Joe Biden and European leaders:

“In response to Russia’s actions, we have activated NATO’s defense plans, deployed elements of the NATO Response Force, and placed 40,000 troops on our eastern flank, along with significant air and naval assets, under direct NATO command supported by Allies’ national deployments. We are also establishing four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.”

In an [interview with CBC News](#) [8] on March 8, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned that a Russian attack on the supply lines of allied nations supporting Ukraine with arms and munitions would be a dangerous escalation of the war raging in Eastern Europe.

“Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine is defending itself. If there is any attack against any NATO country, NATO territory, that will trigger Article 5.”

Reminiscent of the Three Musketeers' motto "all for one and one for all," Article 5 is the self-defense clause in NATO's founding treaty which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all 30 member nations. "I'm absolutely convinced President Putin knows this and we are removing any room for miscalculation, misunderstanding about our commitment to defend every inch of NATO territory," Stoltenberg said.

NATO chief said there's a clear distinction between supply lines within Ukraine and those operating outside its borders.

"There is a war going on in Ukraine and, of course, supply lines inside Ukraine can be attacked," he said. "An attack on NATO territory, on NATO forces, NATO capabilities, that would be an attack on NATO."

On March 13, Russian forces [launched a missile attack](#) [9] at Yavoriv Combat Training Center in the western part of the country. The military facility, less than 25 km from the Polish border, is one of Ukraine's biggest and the largest in the western part of the country. Since 2015, US Green Berets and National Guard troops had been training Ukrainian forces at the Yavoriv center before they were evacuated alongside diplomatic staff in mid-February.

The training center was hit by a barrage of 30 cruise missiles launched from Russian strategic bombers, killing at least 35 people, though Russia's defense ministry claimed up to [180 foreign mercenaries](#) [10] and large caches of weapons were destroyed at the training center.

International diplomacy is predicated on the principle of quid-pro-quo. Russia evidently has no intention of mounting an incursion into NATO territory. But if the duplicitous Polish leadership is hatching treacherous plots to clandestinely occupy western Ukraine and impose no-fly zone over it, then Russia obviously reserves the right to give a response.

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Notes

[1] [Three EU prime ministers visit Kyiv as Russian attacks intensify](#)

[2] [Secret Plan to Send 10,000 NATO "Peacekeeping Troops" Into Ukraine](#)

[3] [How Biden scuttled Polish aircraft deal](#)

[4] [Poland will not send fighter jets into Ukraine, Andrzej Duda](#)

[5] [Mark Milley visited an undisclosed airfield near the Ukraine border](#)

- [6] [Pentagon shores up its NATO defenses in Europe](#)
- [7] [NATO doubles battlegroups in 'Eastern Flank' States](#)
- [8] [NATO chief warns Russia away from attacking supply lines](#)
- [9] [Pentagon push to send more trainers to Ukraine was scrapped](#)
- [10] [Russian airstrike killed 180 foreign mercenaries at Yavoriv](#)

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