

“Protective Shield East”: Poland to build new €2.3 billion eastern wall

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On May 18, the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced the construction of extensive military fortifications along the country’s border with Belarus. The borders of the wall are also to include the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and Ukraine.

Ten billion zlotys, the equivalent of around €2.3 billion, are to be spent on the “East Shield” project over the next two to three years to build a 400-kilometre-long defence belt along the state border. Construction work has already begun.

Tusk’s government had previously announced that it would take tougher action against refugees. The border fortifications erected by the previous government in 2021 are to be expanded. The current 10-metre-high steel fence with cameras and patrols is primarily aimed at refugees crossing the Belarusian border into Poland. The entire political establishment has denounced such refugees as “weapons” in a “hybrid war” being waged against Poland.

Tusk’s latest initiative, however, goes far beyond the repelling of refugees. He is planning the construction of extensive fortifications and bunkers, the likes of which have not been seen since the end of the Second World War.

Tusk explained: “We are launching a major project to build a secure border, including a fortification system incorporating landscaping and ecological elements that will make it impossible for a potential enemy to cross this border.”

The project is reminiscent of the Nazis’ Ostwall. This was the name the Nazis gave to a similar construction project that not only consisted of tunnels and bunkers, but also reshaped the entire landscape with hills and trenches to create favourable military conditions for conducting war.

Tusk used the anniversary of the Battle of Monte

Cassino in May 1944 to announce the project. Many Polish soldiers who fought in the so-called “Anders Army” on the side of the Allies lost their lives in the battle, which was characterised by heavy losses. During a military parade in Krakow, Tusk praised their heroism.

During WWII, the Polish soldiers were fighting against fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Now, however, Tusk is making pacts with fascist elements in Ukraine who honour Nazi collaborators. At the external border of the European Union, Tusk is blatantly disregarding the human rights of refugees in a manner which evokes the legacy of the fascists.

A day earlier, during a visit to a border guard battalion, Tusk had already made it clear that “there will be no spending limits on border security.” He said that work was also underway on a legislative amendment “that will give our soldiers and officers full legal certainty in their activities here,” i.e., full protection from punishment in the event of the mistreatment of refugees.

Tusk has been criticised by numerous human rights organisations for seamlessly continuing the anti-refugee policies of the previous far-right PiS government. In fact, Tusk is intensifying the measures introduced by his predecessor and sealing the border even more tightly.

Details of the billion-euro project are not yet known, but numerous comments make it clear that this eastern wall—Gazetta Wyborcza refers to it as the Tusk Line—is not just about roadblocks, anti-tank ditches and permanent firing positions.

A complex network of roads and bridges for troop movements, barracks and air hangars for the permanent stationing of troops and associated infrastructure measures, from water supply to communications, are

planned. It will undoubtedly also incorporate the experience gained from numerous large-scale NATO manoeuvres. Alone the “Steadfast Defender” exercise required the deployment of tens of thousands of soldiers to the Russian border.

Retired General Waldemar Skrzypczak, who was a member of the former government led by Tusk in 2013, explained in an interview with Wyborcza that fortress formations and specially trained military units would be required to be permanently stationed there. They would have to be newly recruited and know the terrain inside out. In the interplay of artillery, engineer troops and air defence forces, they would have to know exactly what to do.

In his opinion, the 10 billion zlotys are therefore only a start. It is evident that such extensive facilities would entail further operating and maintenance costs in the billions.

Skrzypczak, who was already a general staff candidate in the Stalinist People’s Republic, has criticised the policies of the PiS party and the Tusk government from the right. He accused both of numerous failings and complained that their patriotism was limited to ceremonies.

Surveys show that Poles would rather leave the country than defend it, the former general complained. He therefore called for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to be more involved in everyday life. Respect for them must be constantly present, he said, and they should appear on talk shows and in schools.

His tirade makes clear that Poland’s ruling class is not concerned with “defence.” Those who hold up the “heroic deeds” in the neo-colonial wars of conquest in Iraq and Afghanistan as a role model are planning to do the same in Eastern Europe. Fortifications, as Germany’s East and West Walls have shown, can be used not only for defence but also for offence.

Tusk has spoken of a “pre-war period” in which it is necessary to prepare for war with Russia. The construction of the “Protective Shield East” clearly serves this purpose. NATO is in the process of massively escalating its military confrontation with Russia. It is in the process of allowing Kiev to attack targets inside Russia and is preparing to send its own troops to Ukraine.

Representatives of the former and new Polish governments have also repeatedly described direct

military intervention in the war in Ukraine as an option. The Tusk government and the PiS opposition are in complete agreement on the main features of their war policy. The government differs from the PiS only in its closer military co-operation with the European Union and Germany. Tusk has announced that he will join the German-led European Sky Shield (ESSI) initiative.

He also announced that the European Investment Bank had approved a €300 million loan for the first two Polish surveillance satellites. Together with two ground stations, the satellites should be operational by 2028. In view of the military disaster of the Zelensky regime, the Tusk government is now apparently accelerating its plans. The Tusk Line should be operational as early as 2027.



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