

# Polish President Says NATO Treats Poland Like a 'Buffer Zone'

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Polish President Andrzej Duda

LONDON — Polish President Andrzej Duda on Thursday criticized NATO for treating Poland like a buffer zone between Russia and Germany, telling Britain's Financial Times newspaper that the military alliance needed bases further east.

Duda, a vocal critic of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and support for separatists in Ukraine, wants stronger NATO security guarantees and an increased presence of the Western military alliance on Polish soil.

Germany and some other alliance members have blocked appeals by Poland and other East European members for a permanent NATO combat presence in the region. The alliance has opted instead to intensify joint exercises and rotate troops through the area.

The United States is studying proposals to store military equipment in several East European countries that its troops could use in the case of an attack on NATO's eastern flank.

Moscow has denounced this as aggressive and threatened to beef up its own forces in response if it happens.

"We do not want to be the buffer zone. We want to be the real eastern flank of the alliance," Duda told the newspaper. "Today, when we look at the dispersion of bases ... then the borderline is Germany."

"NATO is supposed to be here to protect the alliance. ... If Poland and other central European countries constitute the real flank of NATO, then it seems natural to me, a logical conclusion, that bases should be placed in those countries."

Duda's foreign affairs adviser Krzysztof Szczerski told Reuters last month that the president's administration would take an assertive stance on Russia, despite fears among some of Warsaw's NATO allies about antagonizing Moscow.

Russia says deployment of significant NATO forces close to its borders would violate the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act.

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