

Role of Armed Russians Spotted Near Estonian Border Still Unclear, Defense Minister Says

By [Charlie Hancock](#)

October 15, 2025



Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur. **Cliff Owen / AP / TASS**

BRUSSELS — Estonia has not yet identified the affiliation or purpose of a group of armed Russian men recently spotted near the Baltic country's border, Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur told The Moscow Times.

Speaking at the NATO defense ministers' meeting, Pevkur told The Moscow Times that journalists should ask Russia who the masked men wearing camouflage were, but should not expect an honest answer.

"Ask the Russians," he said. "Communicating with Russia means that you can never expect that they will tell the truth. They will just tell you what they want to say."

"It was the same also with the MiGs they said were not in their airspace," he added, referring

to the two Russian aircraft that [crossed](#) into Estonian airspace without permission in September.

The armed men had been spotted in the Saatse Boot, a small protrusion of Russian territory surrounded by Estonia on three sides, last Friday.

A remnant of the Soviet annexation of Estonia during World War II, the Saatse Boot is traversed by Estonia's Road 178, which connects the Estonian villages of Lutepaa and Sesniki. It is possible to drive along this road without a Russian entry visa as long as the traveler does not stop.

A 2005 treaty sought to pre-empt problems by swapping the boot for two small parcels of Estonian land, but Moscow never ratified the treaty despite signing it and Tallinn has since ruled out territorial exchanges with Russia.

Although Estonia closed the stretch of Road 178 that cuts through the Saatse Boot after the men were spotted, Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna [said](#) the threat level has not changed.

“To be clear: nothing acute is happening on the border. The Russians are acting somewhat more assertively and visibly than before, but the situation remains under control,” Tsahkna wrote on X on Sunday.

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Pevkur told journalists in Brussels that Russia is using actions within its territory, including the Saatse Boot, to provoke Estonia and other NATO countries.

“We need to be pragmatic, but at the same time, be very clear here that we will not allow any intrusions to our territory,” he said.

Estonia's interior minister is proposing that a new road be built to bypass the Saatse Boot. The country's environment minister [said](#) the government would discuss speeding up the route's construction by scrapping the requirement for an environmental review.

Estonia, a NATO and EU member, is a staunch ally of Ukraine. It has provided nearly 500 million euros in military assistance to Kyiv, or more than 1.4% of its GDP, since Russia's full-scale invasion.

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