

When could Russia attack NATO?

German intelligence says Russia could be capable of large-scale war with NATO around 2030; the Bundeswehr's chief says 2029. Those are readiness estimates, not predictions.



The difference between those two things is the whole answer, so let's take it apart properly.

Where the dates come from

They are arithmetic, not prophecy. Intelligence services track how fast Russia replaces what Ukraine consumes: soldiers, armor, ammunition, junior officers. Germany's BND concludes Russia could be ready for a large-scale conventional war around 2030. General Carsten Breuer, head of the Bundeswehr, says 2029 at the earliest. Denmark's intelligence service published the full spectrum back in 2024: capability for a local war with a neighbor within six months of the fighting in Ukraine ending, a regional Baltic war within two years, a large war with NATO within five.

The math has a real foundation. Russia devotes roughly 38 % of its federal budget to defense and security, and by BND's accounting its true 2025 military spending was near €250 billion once hidden budgets and purchasing power are counted. Parts of its arms industry – above all shells and drones – already produce more than the front consumes.

What the estimates mean – and what they don't

They mean: this is how soon the gun could be loaded. They do not mean: this is when it fires. Capability is half the equation; the other half is a decision, and decisions in Moscow are made on the odds of success. Intelligence agencies publish these numbers precisely so that they never come true – a prepared Europe moves the calculation.

Three things feed that decision: how the Ukraine war ends, how strong and united European de-

fense becomes, and how credible the American commitment stays. The first is largely outside Europe's control. The second is entirely inside it. The third is why Europe is building the capacity to stand on its own feet regardless – the sums are on our page on what European self-defense would take.

What moves the clock

Toward earlier: a bad end in Ukraine – a frozen ceasefire that releases hundreds of thousands of veteran troops while the factories keep their three shifts. And cheap wins in the gray zone: if cable cuts and drone incursions keep going unanswered, the appetite for trying more grows.

Toward later, or off the calendar entirely: European rearmament. Allies spent over \$574 billion in 2025, nearly a fifth more than the year before, and signed up at The Hague to 3.5 % of GDP on core defense. Every addition stretches the payback period of an attack until it stops paying at all.

How to read the warnings

Analysts watch concrete indicators: force build-ups in Belarus and Kaliningrad, recruitment rates, the tempo of sabotage in Europe, mobilization moves in the Russian economy. When you read about them, read them like weather reports – they change probabilities, they don't announce dates.

And keep the paradox of the question in view: the best answer to "when?" is "never," and that date isn't chosen in Moscow. It is chosen by how strong and how united the continent decides to be.

[All questions →](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED**Will Russia attack NATO in 2026?**

Nothing points to it. Russia's army is tied down in Ukraine, and no Western intelligence service reports an imminent threat to any NATO member – the estimates concern capability later this decade.

Where do the 2029 and 2030 estimates come from?

From reconstitution math: how fast Russia can rebuild troops, tanks, ammunition and officers after its Ukraine losses. Germany's BND says capable of large-scale war around 2030; Bundeswehr chief Carsten Breuer says 2029 at the earliest.

Why would Russia attack NATO at all?

Not for territory. The scenarios analysts take seriously involve a limited strike – most often in the Baltics – designed to show that Article 5 doesn't work, and so to break the alliance politically.

Does the end of the Ukraine war make attack more likely?

It cuts both ways. A real peace lowers the risk; a frozen ceasefire without guarantees would free hundreds of thousands of Russian troops while arms factories keep running at full tilt.

Can Europe change the timeline?

That is the point of publishing the estimates. Every brigade and ammunition plant Europe adds pushes Moscow's cost-benefit calculation from 'maybe' toward 'never.' European allies raised defense spending nearly 20 % in 2025 alone.

SOURCES

- BND assessments (2025–2026): capability for large-scale conventional war around 2030; real military spending ~€250bn
- Gen. Carsten Breuer, Bundeswehr: 2029 at the earliest
- Danish Defence Intelligence Service (2024): six months to five years, by conflict type
- SIPRI (2026): Russia's 2026 budget – defense and security ~38 % of federal spending
- The Hague Summit Declaration (2025): 5 % commitment (3.5 % core) by 2035