

US, EU escalate war threats against Russia over Crimea annexation

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Continuing its well-prepared campaign to exploit the Ukrainian crisis as a pretext for a vast expansion of imperialist operations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Washington and its European Union (EU) allies responded yesterday to Russia's official annexation of Crimea by calling for a military buildup that would put NATO on a perpetual war footing against Moscow.

Speaking yesterday at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said: "Ladies and gentlemen, we live in a different world than we did less than a month ago... The annexation of Crimea through a so-called referendum held at gun point is illegal and illegitimate."

Were it not for the potentially catastrophic consequences of NATO's actions, Rasmussen's statements would have a grotesquely farcical character. Nothing he said bore any relation to reality.

The portrayal of NATO as a peaceful opponent of Russian aggression is a political fraud. The majority-Russian Crimean population voted overwhelmingly to join Russia principally due to fear of the anti-Semitic, anti-Russian forces the West unleashed in Ukraine when it backed the February 22 fascist-led putsch in Kiev. This regime now rules Kiev with appeals to anti-Russian chauvinism and by relying on violence to intimidate its opponents.

Rasmussen is outlining a policy of continually stoking war hysteria against Russia, in order to isolate Moscow and shift US and European politics dramatically to the right. This includes increasing military spending and the US military presence in Europe—a continent already bankrupted by five years of budget cuts and austerity measures.

Rasmussen told the *Washington Post* there is now "no doubt that Europe has to invest more in defense

and security." He added that "many Europeans would like a reaffirmation of the US commitment to European security... Developments in Ukraine are a stark reminder that security in Europe cannot be taken for granted," Rasmussen said. "We need to focus on the long-term strategic impact of Russia's aggression on our own security."

This policy is being closely coordinated with Washington. Before his speech, Rasmussen attended a "working dinner" hosted by US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, together with Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Advisor Susan Rice. Hagel is preparing for a meeting with the Business Roundtable, an influential US business lobby, to discuss Ukraine and US military spending.

These policies aim to transform NATO into an anti-Russian military alliance, with outposts in ex-Soviet states all along Russia's borders in a campaign of permanent military pressure on Moscow that threatens to escalate into war. US Vice President Joe Biden outlined a policy of militarily isolating and threatening Russia in his remarks delivered to officials of the Baltic states in Vilnius, Lithuania. He also had a phone call with the prime minister of the Kiev regime, former banker Arseniy Yatseniuk.

Biden stressed the broad military guarantees Washington is offering Eastern European regimes amid the ongoing US military buildup in the region—which involves surveillance flights over Poland and Romania, warplane deployments to Poland and the Baltics, and stepped-up training exercises in the region.

He said, "We stand resolutely with our Baltic allies in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russian aggression. As long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation."

He added, “The reason I traveled to the Baltics was to reaffirm our mutual commitment to collective defense. President Obama wanted me to come personally to make it clear what you already know, that under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, we will respond. We will respond to any aggression against a NATO ally.”

According to Article 5 of the NATO treaty, member states “agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.”

These moves to inflame military tensions reflect a broad, aggressive shift in imperialist policy that finds fullest expression in escalation of the military operations of Germany—the power that, together with the United States, is pushing most aggressively for a confrontation with Russia over Ukraine.

The German media is unleashing a campaign for harsh economic sanctions and a more aggressive military build-up against Russia. Today’s lead comment in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* calls upon Obama to take “a lesson in Cold War history,” lamenting: “The world will not improve by itself, simply because Obama extends his hand to everyone. And crises like in Syria or Ukraine do not disappear simply because they bore Obama.”

The *Süddeutsche* then praises NATO as the “foundation of a basic international order. Whoever, like Ukraine, belongs neither to NATO nor exactly either to the West or to the East rapidly becomes a victim of the appetites of neighboring autocrats. The Baltic states and Poland, on the other hand, can be fairly sure that they are protected from Putin’s Special Forces.”

For the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, NATO’s response is not nearly enough. It complains, “Putin knows that NATO is not a threat to Russia; in the Crimean crisis, only the Fiji Islands could have reacted in a more restrained way than the NATO leadership.”

The level of aggressiveness, distortions and outright lying in the German media has not been heard since Goebbels ran the propaganda ministry under Hitler. The media is supporting an increase in German military activity called for by President Joachim Gauck at the Munich Security Conference earlier this year.

The Ukrainian crisis, which Chancellor Angela Merkel and other key figures in the German state played a major role in instigating, provides the pretext

for the implementation of a carefully planned militaristic reorientation of the country’s foreign policy.

Almost exactly one month ago, on February 21, 2014, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a major Washington think tank, published a statement, “Is Germany Ready to Lead?” It explained: “For over a year, senior German officials have been carefully preparing the way for a shift towards a more assertive foreign and security policy.”

The analysis noted that the removal of former Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle had been necessary to implement the new policy. The CSIS also welcomed the signs in the “public debate” conducted in the media—that is, the unending stream of militaristic propaganda—“that a new consensus may be emerging among the German elite,” and expressed the hope that “over time, the public may follow.”

Now, after Berlin played a leading role in orchestrating the fascist-led putsch in Kiev on February 22, the German ruling elite feels that the time is right to repudiate the military restraints placed on Germany after the end of the Second World War and the horrible crimes of the Nazis. It is fueling the conflict with Russia to resume its traditional role as the dominant power in Eastern Europe.

Ahead of the EU summit taking place today and tomorrow in Brussels, the German cabinet has approved the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine that, according to its preamble, seeks “Ukraine’s gradual integration in the EU internal market...and to support Ukrainian efforts to complete the transition into a functioning market economy.”

That is, Berlin and the EU are deepening their ties with outright fascists in the Ukrainian government to turn the country into a cheap labor platform for European finance capital and an outpost of the EU and NATO for military provocations against Russia.



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