

Russia warns NATO over military build-up in eastern Europe

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Russian officials formally protested NATO's military build-up in Eastern Europe yesterday, warning that it is undermining treaties that have governed NATO-Russian relations since the dissolution of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991.

This week, NATO broke off military cooperation with Russia and carried out military exercises in several countries bordering or near Russia, including the Baltic states and Bulgaria. This was part of a broader military build-up, pursued since the fascist-led putsch that installed a pro-Western regime in Ukraine in February, that has seen NATO forces deployed or military exercises planned in Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that Moscow is demanding explanations from NATO over this military build-up. "We have addressed questions to the North Atlantic military alliance. We are expecting not just any answer, but an answer fully respectful of the rules we have coordinated," he said.

Lavrov accused NATO of breaching the 1997 agreement between NATO and Russia, which specifies that NATO will not carry out any new "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces." He also accused NATO of breaching the Montreux convention on naval deployments to the Black Sea, which requires that warships from non-Black Sea countries stay in the region only 21 days. "US warships have recently extended their presence in the Black Sea several times. This extension did not always obey the rules of the Montreux Convention," Lavrov said.

Russia recalled its ambassador to NATO, ostensibly for consultations, two days after NATO suspended cooperation with Russia. "The policy of whipping up tensions is not our choice. Nonetheless, we see no possibility to continue military cooperation with NATO in a routine regime," Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said.

NATO officials indicated that they would press ahead with their escalation, ignoring Russian objections. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen dismissed Lavrov's speech as "just another piece of Russian propaganda and disinformation."

Rasmussen indicated that, in his view, NATO was no longer bound by the 1997 treaty. Citing the 2008 Georgian war and today's crisis in Ukraine, he said: "Russia is violating every principle and international commitment it has made, first and foremost the commitment not to invade other countries."

Rasmussen's arguments to justify the reckless NATO escalation in Eastern Europe by portraying Russia as the aggressor are a pack of lies. The 2008 Georgian war, as was later admitted even by US officials, began when the US-backed Georgian regime assaulted Russian peacekeepers stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who had attacked no one.

Attempts to portray NATO as a defender of world order and international law are transparent frauds. Even leaving aside the fact that the NATO powers operate global torture and drone murder operations, they have time and again—in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and last year's war scare in Syria—sought to wage aggressive war despite opposition at the UN Security Council, in violation of international law.

As for the current crisis in Ukraine, it exploded after the NATO powers brazenly backed a putsch in Kiev led by fascist groups like the Right Sector and the Svoboda party to topple a pro-Russian Ukrainian regime and install a regime militarily aligned with NATO directly on Russia's borders.

NATO's aggressive escalation, carried out over the Kremlin's warnings that it is tearing up all the legal foundations of the highly fragile peace in Europe, threatens a war between NATO and Russia—a major military power with a massive arsenal of nuclear

weapons. This reflects the intensifying international contradictions tearing at European and world capitalism, which can be fought only by unifying the international working class against the danger of imperialist war.

The Russian capitalist oligarchy for which the Kremlin speaks cannot make any appeal to the broad anti-war sentiment that exists in the international working class. Rather, it is seeking to convince factions of the political establishment in the imperialist countries to strike a deal, even as NATO moves to blow up the limited forms of cooperation set up since the 1990s.

Thus, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Lukashevich complained in a statement on Wednesday that NATO was returning to “the Cold War era.” He warned that this would hamper collaboration between Russia and NATO on “fighting terrorism, piracy, and natural and man-made disasters.”

Lukashevich’s positions epitomize the bankruptcy of the Kremlin. Its collaboration with NATO has seen Russia function as an accomplice of such crimes as NATO’s bloody war in Afghanistan—transporting supplies overland through Russia and ex-Soviet Central Asia to NATO occupation forces in Afghanistan.

The Western imperialist powers are scrapping their collaboration with the Kremlin on issues like anti-piracy operations, however, as they struggle over a far more significant prize: geo-strategic and financial control of Eastern Europe, and ultimately of Russia itself.

The day after NATO’s decision to end cooperation with Russia, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Germany’s largest national subscription daily newspaper, bluntly declared that “NATO now regards Russia as an enemy.”

Yesterday, in an interview with the German weekly *Die Zeit* published under the headline, “An invasion is possible,” Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk demanded the installation of a missile shield and the deployment of NATO troops to Poland. “Our accounting is simple,” he argued. “Better than all the reassurances written on paper is the physical presence of NATO in Poland. This is also in Europe’s interest, because here in the East, there is the [European] Union’s real external border.”

The disastrous consequences of the Stalinist bureaucracy’s restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe are coming fully into view. Driven by the deepening crisis of world capitalism, the imperialist powers in NATO are pressing ahead with an escalation designed to assert control of Eastern Europe and justify diverting massive funds to military spending.

They are raising unsubstantiated accusations of an

imminent invasion of Ukraine as a pretext to build up their forces in Eastern Europe and work out war plans against Russia. Speaking to Reuters and the *Wall Street Journal*, NATO’s supreme allied commander, US Air Force General Philip Breedlove, claimed that 40,000 Russian troops had massed on the Ukrainian border. He issued dire warnings of a looming Russian onslaught: “We think that it is ready to go, and we think it could accomplish its objectives in between three and five days, if it was directed to make the actions.”

Though Western officials and media have given no proof of Russia’s allegedly massive build-up at the Ukrainian border, they are brandishing the specter of an impending Russian invasion.

Calling the situation “incredibly concerning,” Breedlove warned that the Russian army has “the entire suite that would be required to successfully have an incursion into Ukraine, should the decision be made.” He suggested that Russia might try to overrun all of southern and eastern Ukraine, perhaps in order to establish overland communications to Transdnistria, a Russian-speaking, separatist region of Moldova, to the west of Ukraine.

Breedlove outlined NATO’s plans to encircle Russia by arming Eastern European states to the teeth and massively increasing military spending by the NATO countries: “We will work on air, land and sea ‘reassurances’ and we will look to position those ‘reassurances’ across the breadth of our exposure: north, center, and south... And now the tougher discussion will be with our allies about what is that land component that will be the reassurance piece that carries us into this new paradigm.”

Such plans would involve the militarization of Europe and deep attacks on the working class in the imperialist countries to finance the military escalation that NATO is preparing.



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