

Detention of OSCE mission provides pretext for US escalation

US, European Union, G7 set to impose new sanctions on Russia

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The United States has seized on the detention of Western military observers by pro-Russian militants in Slavyansk in eastern Ukraine to ratchet up its propaganda war against Moscow and push through new and more draconian sanctions.

The affair has all the hallmarks of another provocation on the part of Washington designed to escalate the crisis over Ukraine and use it to isolate, militarily encircle and cripple Russia. America's closest ally in this project is Germany, which seeks to exploit the crisis to revive its own imperialist ambitions in the east, which led it to invade and occupy Ukraine and attack Russia twice in the last century.

Eight military officers led by four Germans and accompanied by five Ukrainian soldiers, operating under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), were on their way to the besieged city of Slavyansk Friday when they were intercepted by forces opposing the regime installed in Kiev in a US/German-orchestrated putsch spearheaded by fascist Right Sector paramilitary forces.

On Sunday, OSCE civilian negotiators met with rebel officials in Slavyansk and secured the release of one of the detained military officers, a Swede. Slavyansk officials said the officer, who suffers from diabetes, was released for medical reasons.

The German-led mission was not part of the civilian monitoring program agreed to in March by the 57 member nations of the OSCE, including Russia. OSCE officials in Vienna said they were not aware of the reason for the intervention of the military "observers," and Germany declined to comment.

The visit came one day after Ukrainian troops attacked checkpoints set up by pro-Russian protesters in Slavyansk, killing five anti-Kiev regime militants. As the Russian Foreign Ministry pointed out Saturday, those in control of Slavyansk and the broader Donetsk region had been given no advance notice of the mission, and there was no attempt

to clear the presence of these pro-regime military forces in the area.

Vyacheslav Ponomarev, the self-proclaimed mayor of Slavyansk, accused the officers of carrying out a spying operation to map the deployment of opposition forces in order to aid the Western-backed military operation being carried out by Ukrainian troops in the region.

He said Saturday that his men had confiscated military maps from members of the mission. Yevgeny Gorbik, a spokesperson for the oppositionists in Slavyansk, said, "The humanitarian group of the [OSCE] mission denied any relation to them. They had intelligence agents, cryptograms and notebooks with secret notes."

The presence of Kiev regime and Western spies in the east was underscored on Saturday, when pro-Russian militants in Slavyansk captured three officers of Ukraine's security service, the SBU, accusing them of seeking to kidnap Slavyansk's pro-Russian leader. The SBU confirmed that its operatives had been seized in the Donetsk region.

The Kiev regime blamed the detention of the OSCE military mission on Russia, citing it as another example of Moscow's alleged aggression and war-mongering.

In a telephone call to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, US Secretary of State John Kerry demanded that Russia secure the release of the OSCE officers "without preconditions," rejecting suggestions by the pro-Russian authorities in Slavyansk that the officers be released in exchange for anti-regime figures being detained by the Kiev government. Lavrov pledged to seek the release of the officers, but demanded that the US call off the Ukrainian government crackdown on protesters in the east.

Later Friday, following the detention of the OSCE officers, US President Barack Obama interrupted his Asian tour to hold a telephone conference call with the heads of government of Germany, Britain, France and Italy to secure agreement on a new round of sanctions against Russia. On Saturday, the G7 group of industrialized nations, which

includes Japan and Canada in addition to the US and the four European countries, formally announced plans to impose new sanctions as early as Monday.

European Union ambassadors are reportedly set to meet Monday to decide on an additional list of individuals in Russia and Ukraine to be hit with travel bans and asset freezes.

On Saturday, Obama's deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, told reporters aboard Air Force One that the US would name additional sanctions targets including "cronies" of Russian President Vladimir Putin who have, according to a report by the *Wall Street Journal*, "significant assets and influence with the Russian leadership, as well as banks and companies associated with the individuals."

White House deputy national security adviser Tony Blinken, appearing Sunday on CBS News' "Face the Nation" program, said the new US measures would be imposed on Monday. "We will be looking to designate people who are in [Putin's] inner circle, who have a significant impact on the Russian economy...We will be looking at taking steps, as well, with regard to high-technology exports to their defense industry."

Blinken boasted that the US-led campaign against Russia over the Ukraine crisis had already led to a 22 percent decline in Russian financial markets since the beginning of the year and brought the ruble to its lowest-ever level.

The escalation of sanctions and military threats against Russia is justified on the grounds that the opposition to the new Western-backed regime in Kiev that erupted in Crimea and spread to eastern Ukraine, mainly-Russian-speaking regions with close economic and historical ties to Russia, are the result of Russian manipulation. On the basis of this premise, universally proclaimed as fact by the media without any serious substantiation, the Obama administration attributes the continued resistance to the new government in the east of Ukraine to Russian "aggression," and cites it as proof that Russia has violated the four-party agreement to deescalate the crisis over Ukraine reached April 17 in Geneva.

The US brokered that agreement after the initial attempt by Kiev at a military crackdown against insurgents in the east, launched following a secret visit to Kiev by CIA Director John Brennan, collapsed when local residents turned out to oppose government troops and armored vehicles and some of the troops refused to fire on the protesters and deserted to the other side.

Washington intended all along for the Geneva agreement to serve as a pretext for further sanctions and military moves against Russia. The agreement calls for all illegal armed groups to be disbanded. The Obama administration has attributed the continued occupation of government buildings

in the east by pro-Russian forces to Russian intrigue and cited it as proof that Moscow is violating the Geneva deal.

But Washington says nothing about the continued occupation of Kiev's Independence Square by right-wing thugs of the Right Sector, or the deployment of Right Sector gangs to the east to attack and beat up pro-Russian protesters.

The pursuit of this policy directly risks the outbreak of war between the US and NATO on one side, and Russia on the other—that is, a conflict that would likely spark a nuclear world war.

The Putin regime represents the reactionary oligarchs who enriched themselves by looting the former state property of the Soviet Union following the dismantling of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It wants to avoid being drawn into a military incursion into eastern Ukraine, but faces a foe in Washington that seems bent on goading it into doing just that by stoking a civil war in Ukraine.

On Saturday, the Russian Defense Ministry issued a statement quoting Chief of Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov: "Our concern is caused by an increase of the US air force and American military personnel in the Baltics and Poland, and also the alliance's ships in the Black Sea."

The same day, Washington deployed 150 paratroopers to Lithuania, bringing the total number of announced US troops in Poland and the former Soviet Baltic states to 600. And Ukrainian military forces, egged on by Washington, continued to reinforce existing checkpoints and set up new ones around centers of resistance such as Slavyansk in an attempt to crush the rebellion against the regime in Kiev.



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