Ukraine reinstates military draft as NATO threatens Russia

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NATO officials escalated their military build-up against Russia yesterday, as the pro-Western puppet regime in Kiev reinstated conscription in order to boost its crackdown on spreading pro-Russian protests in eastern Ukraine.

The news came as the position of the far-right regime in Kiev weakened, with more cities and government buildings in east Ukraine held by protesters and militias opposed to it. Protesters stormed the prosecutor's office, disarming police, in the city of Donetsk, one of many cities in the region, including Luhansk, Slavyansk, and Kramatorsk, now outside of Kiev's control.

A statement issued by the Kiev regime's acting president Oleksandr Turchynov confirmed that the aim of the conscription order, for all able-bodied males between 18 and 25, was to boost the crackdown in predominately Russian-speaking areas. The order was issued "given the deteriorating situation in the east and the south [and] the rising force of armed pro-Russian units and the taking of public administration buildings," the statement declared. It added that the protests "threaten the territorial integrity" of Ukraine.

Turchynov's justification for the conscription order is a political fraud. His regime, the product of a Western-backed putsch, does not stand for Ukraine's independence or its territorial integrity. The regime has launched crackdowns planned in discussions with top US officials such as CIA Director John Brennan and Vice President Joe Biden, who visited Kiev as successive waves of repression began.

The contempt of the Kiev regime and its imperialist backers for the Ukrainian population was further underscored by their agreement to a $17 billion bailout package dictated by the International Monetary Fund. It is conditioned on unpopular fuel price increases and mass layoffs in the public sector that have already provoked protests in several cities.

Turchynov has admitted that his regime's security forces are "helpless" to stop the spread of pro-Russian seizures of cities and government buildings across east Ukraine. Some army and police units have refused orders to shoot protesters. The Kiev regime has turned to setting up private militias led by business oligarchs or fascist paramilitaries from the Right Sector to attack the protesters.

This crackdown has placed the world on the verge of war. Moscow has stated that it will use "all means" to protect ethnic Russians from Ukrainian forces, should the Kiev regime's crackdown escalate into a large-scale massacre of the population of east Ukraine. In a phone call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded that all Ukrainian troops be withdrawn from eastern Ukraine.

The conscription order is a desperate attempt to bolster the tottering Kiev regime amid deepening political crisis and rising popular opposition. If obeyed in parts of the country still under Kiev's control, it would provide back-up to the fascist forces spearheading the repression of the protests.

It would also place an army of over a million men, supported and equipped by NATO, directly on Russia's southwestern border. In this, the Kiev regime is doing the bidding of its Western imperialist masters, who are recklessly denouncing Russia and mounting a military build-up across Eastern Europe laying the basis for a major war with Russia.

Yesterday, NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow branded Russia an enemy. "Clearly the Russians have declared NATO as an adversary, so we have to begin to view Russia no

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longer as a partner, but as more of an adversary than a partner," he said.

Vershbow said NATO could repudiate its 1997 pledge not to station nuclear weapons or large numbers of troops in Eastern Europe. Given Russia's annexation of the Crimea and the east Ukraine protests, he said, "we would be within our rights" to scrap the deal and permanently station "significant" numbers of troops in Eastern Europe.

The Western powers are seizing upon the Ukraine crisis to try to carry out a major restructuring of European and world politics. Like the September 11, 2001 attacks, which US imperialism exploited to launch a series of unpopular Middle East wars, the Ukraine crisis is to provide the Western imperialist powers with a justification for a massive military escalation and the preparation of large-scale wars.

Such topics will doubtless be at the heart of discussions today between US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is visiting Washington, DC.

Claims that NATO's reckless escalation is simply a response to Russian military aggression are lies. Protests in eastern Ukraine—previously the power base of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych, who was deposed by the February putsch—are not the product of Russian aggression, but of broad opposition to the oligarchs and fascists who lead the Kiev regime. They are a consequence of the reckless decision of the NATO powers, led by Washington and Berlin, to back the putsch and then stoke tensions with Moscow.

Since the Kiev putsch, Washington and its NATO allies have stationed fighter jets and ground forces in Poland, the Baltic States, and Romania. They have also stepped up naval deployments to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, while hypocritically denouncing Russia for stationing troops along its western border with Ukraine.

Vershbow said that NATO will deploy more forces, to be able to intervene rapidly in the Baltic states. "We want to be sure that we can come to the aid of these countries if there were any, even indirect, threat very quickly before any facts on the ground can be established," he said.

Such a deployment would be wildly provocative. Were NATO forces to be stationed in the northernmost Baltic country, Estonia, they would be less than 100 miles from Russia's second-largest city, St. Petersburg.

NATO officials also announced yesterday that they were examining ways to grant NATO membership status to the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia, in the southern Caucasus.

Such a move also directly raises the risk of war between Russia and NATO. Russia and Georgia fought a brief war in 2008, after Georgia attacked Russian peacekeepers stationed in ethnic minority regions of Georgia along its border with Russia. Had Georgia been a NATO member state at the time, the other NATO powers could have invoked the Clause 5 mutual self-defense guarantee between NATO member states to justify intervening in the war on Georgia's side.

NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus James Appathurai pledged that the organization would ignore Russian objections to Georgian membership in NATO.

"What Russia says or does will not influence our decision," he said. "We will judge Georgia on Georgia's merits and regardless of what's happening elsewhere and regardless of comments from the Kremlin or elsewhere … We are now looking, of course, at next steps, at bringing Georgia even closer to NATO and to meeting its goals."

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