

EU, US intensify confrontation with Russia

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The US and European Union are stepping up their campaign against Russia as the Ukrainian army intensifies its attack on the civilian population in the east of the country, unleashing a humanitarian catastrophe. Meanwhile, in leading political and military circles there is increasing talk of a direct military engagement with Russia.

On Sunday NATO head Anders Fogh Rasmussen gave an interview to the French newspaper *Midi Libre* declaring that the military alliance anticipated “Russian aggression” and would respond accordingly. NATO would “intensify its military maneuvers and draw up new defense plans,” Rasmussen said. He also reiterated his call for a substantial increase in the military budgets of NATO member states.

On the same day, the Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov used his blog to call upon the EU and the US not only to supply weapons to the forces controlled by Kiev, but also support the direct intervention of NATO forces to suppress opposition in the east of the country.

A report of the US television network CNN on Sunday made clear how quickly the rationale for a NATO intervention could develop. According to the report, on July 18, just one day after the crash of the Malaysian passenger plane MH17, an American espionage plane was detected by Russian radar and forced to evacuate the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad by a Russian interceptor. The US flight crew apparently thought the situation to be so dangerous that they fled into Swedish airspace without first obtaining permission to do so.

For its part Russia commenced a military maneuver on Monday which in part will take place close to the Ukrainian border, and, according to Russian sources, includes more than 100 combat aircraft. The exercise is due to last until Friday and had been planned some time ago. The Russian military command describes the

operation as part of a series of maneuvers aimed at improving the organization of the country’s air force.

The German government has meanwhile expanded its existing economic sanctions against Russia. According to a report in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) has permanently withdrawn approval for the export of a combat training center by the German Rheinmetall defense company. The contract for the construction of the center in the Russian Volga region was valued at 100 million euros. The decision by Gabriel goes well beyond the remit of existing EU sanctions against Russia, which affected future arms exports while protecting existing contracts.

The aggression against Russia is being accompanied by a hysterical media campaign. Since its launch last week by *Der Spiegel* not a day has passed without a fresh bout of blatant propaganda for war.

On Monday journalist Reinhard Vesper outlined a scenario in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* whereby Russia was not only militarily active in eastern Ukraine, but could also annex all of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia. Given this alleged threat, Vesper wrote, the West must “strengthen and also demonstrate its military preparedness.” “What is needed is a new twin track decision,” i.e. a new variant of the decision by NATO members made in December 1979 to deploy nuclear weapons in Western Europe in order to step up military pressure against the Soviet Union.

Last Thursday, Professor Stefan Troebst from the University of Leipzig demanded in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* a policy of containment for Russia, which would include “drawing strict lines, troop relocations and embargoes, even blockades.” Basing himself on similar proposals by the leading Green politician Werner Schulz, Troebst suggested cutting off Russia’s Black Sea Fleet from the world’s oceans by blocking the Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

As commentators and journalists outdo one another with their war-mongering, the Ukrainian army is proceeding brutally against the civilian population in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk, which are controlled by pro-Russian separatists. A report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released last week reported that the Ukrainian army was deploying Grad missiles against residential areas. The missiles, dating from the Soviet era, are powerful weapons and also notoriously imprecise. Their use against large cities invariably results in high numbers of victims among the civilian population.

Insurgents are now reporting that modern and even more deadly Uragan missiles are being used. Dozens of Uragan systems are being stationed around Donetsk, according to the rebels. The Russian Foreign Ministry also stated that Tochka ballistic missile systems would be erected near the city. Last week evidence emerged of the use of these heavy duty weapons, which have an enormous destructive power. There has been no confirmation of the reports from the Ukrainian side.

The situation for the civilian population in the two cities of Donetsk and Luhansk besieged by the Kiev regime has worsened dramatically. "Telephone communication is paralyzed, the railway hospital was destroyed by six direct hits, and a clinic and a crèche were severely damaged," according to the City Council of Luhansk on Saturday. Mayor of Luhansk Sergei Kravchenko warned that the city was on the "brink of a humanitarian catastrophe." Both the electricity and water supply had collapsed.

On Monday rebel sources reported that 523 people had been killed and more than 3,000 were injured alone in Donetsk since fighting began. "The victims are in the main civilians" said Andrej Rodkin, a representative of the separatists in Moscow. No independent confirmation of these figures is available.

Conditions for the Ukrainian soldiers have also been described as devastating. Many soldiers are often cut off from supplies for weeks at a time and lack basic foodstuffs. Many of the troops mobilized have reportedly refused to train their guns on their fellow countrymen in the East.

On Monday the Russian news agency Ria Novosti reported that 438 Ukrainian soldiers had used a humanitarian corridor to Russia to request asylum at the Russian border. It was later reported that 180 of the

soldiers sought to return to Ukraine and had been taken back to the border. The Ukrainian military has disputed the reports, declaring that soldiers had been forced to flee to Russian territory but had not surrendered.

The war and the anti-social actions of the government are aggravating the social situation for workers throughout Ukraine. The hot water supply was cut off in the capital city of Kiev on Monday. Mayor Vitali Klitschko justified the move by invoking the difficult economic situation and the halt of gas supplies from Russia. The hot water system is only to be reconnected in October at the beginning of the heating season. "We have to do without hot water in order to build up the gas depots for the winter," Klitschko declared.

Meanwhile protests against the war are growing throughout the country. There have been widespread reports of protesting soldiers' mothers, especially in areas with a strong Romanian minority. Now, more and more reports of protests are emerging from all parts of Ukraine.

The German *Stern* news magazine reported that barracks and offices in western Ukraine were being occupied to prevent the conscription of more soldiers. In Bogorodchany in Ivano-Frankivsk women demanded "conscription for the children of politicians." Protests have also been recorded in Kiev, Lviv, Belaya Tserkov, and Nikolayev.



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