

War threat grows as Russia prepares to intervene in east Ukraine

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Preparations for a Russian humanitarian intervention in east Ukraine are setting the stage for a military clash between Russia and the US-backed Ukrainian regime. As confusion increases over the positions of the different powers involved in Ukraine's civil war, the risk of escalation into a world war, as the Ukrainian regime in Kiev would appeal to the United States and its European allies against Russia, is ever more starkly posed.

Yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that Kiev had reversed itself and accepted Russian proposals for a humanitarian mission to bring basic supplies to the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk, which fascistic forces loyal to Kiev have surrounded and are mercilessly shelling.

"With careful optimism, I can now say that, I think, all possible and impossible pretexts have been dismissed. I hope that in the very nearest future, this humanitarian action will take place under the authority of the Red Cross," Lavrov said. The mission would ostensibly bring emergency supplies to the two cities, which are now without electricity, water, or re-supply of food. Over one million people face starvation and possible epidemics. Over 700,000 Ukrainians have already fled to Russia.

While implying that Moscow believed that it had received approval for the mission from the US puppet regime in Kiev, Lavrov denounced statements this weekend from the United States, Britain and Germany opposing such a mission. "If what was said is true, and all three leaders agreed there is no need for humanitarian aid to southeastern Ukraine, because all necessary measures are already being taken, then it's a blatant expression of cynicism," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also called European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and told him that "Russia, working together with International Red Cross officials, is sending a humanitarian convoy to Ukraine," according to a Kremlin statement. Barroso

reportedly told Putin not to carry out "any unilateral military actions" in Ukraine.

US President Barack Obama called Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko yesterday to discuss the Russian intervention. Obama "expressed his strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," according to a White House statement, and added that Russian intervention would be unacceptable to the United States and, in Washington's view, would violate international law.

Obama left some ambiguity in the US position, however, suggesting that a Russian intervention might be acceptable to the United States government if Kiev consented to the operation.

This amounted to an unexplained 180-degree turn in the US position on a Russian intervention in Ukraine. On Friday, UN Ambassador Samantha Power said: "Any further unilateral intervention by Russia into Ukrainian territory, including one under the guise of providing humanitarian aid, would be completely unacceptable and would be viewed as an invasion of Ukraine."

Kiev took multiple contradictory positions. Presidential spokesman Valeriy Chaly bluntly rejected a Russian intervention, writing on his Facebook page: "We are not expecting a 'humanitarian convoy' of any kind."

Other Kiev regime officials, speaking to the Associated Press, peddled the absurd claim that Kiev itself launched the initiative for a humanitarian intervention—to aid cities it is trying to isolate and crush with intensive artillery bombardments.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry statement even appeared to welcome Russian intervention, claiming it was part of an international relief effort. "Apart from deliveries provided by Ukraine, the mission will feature an international component, including aid provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross by the United States, the EU, as well as Russia," its statement declared.

Russian officials gave contradictory signals on what their “humanitarian” mission entails. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said the Russian humanitarian convoy might enter Ukraine this week and that—in what would be a suicidal strategy, given the violent hostility to Russia of the fascist militias fighting for Kiev in east Ukraine—the convoy would not have a military escort.

At the same time, Russian military officials are clearly preparing for large-scale combat along the Ukrainian-Russian border. NATO claimed that 45,000 Russian troops are massing along the border, and Russia carried out large-scale air exercises last week. As he visited Russia’s 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told the troops: “The world has changed drastically. As you know from past incidents, including the experience of this brigade, peacekeeping units can be called upon unexpectedly.”

The Western-backed offensive by the Kiev regime in east Ukraine has placed Europe and the world on the brink of war. Serious questions are raised by the sudden shift in the position of Washington and the Kiev regime to possibly allow a Russian humanitarian intervention in Ukraine. Even if these statements were being made in good faith, which is by no means clear, there is no guarantee that either Obama or Poroshenko exercise effective control over the CIA operatives, Blackwater mercenaries, and Ukrainian fascist militias who would face a Russian aid convoy on the ground.

Whatever statements are being issued by Moscow or Kiev, claims that Russia could mount a humanitarian operation in east Ukraine without triggering a military response from the anti-Russian Ukrainian fascist militias fighting in the region are simply not credible. There has already been repeated shelling of Russian border posts by the Kiev regime.

The risk of war posed to the European and world working class could not be more stark. It must be assumed that a Russian intervention in Ukraine—even if it began with a supposedly peaceful, “humanitarian” operation—will lead to the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine. This could rapidly escalate into a conflict between Russia and NATO, which has been building up its forces throughout Eastern Europe and the Black Sea since the Ukrainian crisis broke out.

Central responsibility for this situation rests with the imperialist powers in North America and Europe, which backed protests and a February putsch led by fascist forces that toppled pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. The installation of a violently anti-

Russian regime directly on Russia’s borders was calculated to provoke mass opposition, particularly in east Ukraine near Russia where Yanukovich had his base, and to place enormous pressure on the Kremlin.

Constantly pouring fuel on the fire, the Western governments and media have denounced Russia, threatened it militarily, and imposed massive sanctions on Russia even as Ukrainian fascist atrocities mounted. They have done everything to provoke a situation in which the Russian government, its back to the wall, decided to embark on a military response to the crisis in Ukraine.

The hypocrisy of US criticisms of a Russian “humanitarian” mission in east Ukraine is staggering. In countries where there was far less human suffering and bloodshed, Washington has claimed the right to bomb and attack whoever it pleases—notably attacking Libya in 2011, claiming this was necessary to head off the possibility of state repression of a US-backed uprising in Benghazi.

None of this would lend any progressive character to the actions of the Kremlin and Russia’s bankrupt capitalist oligarchy. Incapable of, and hostile to, making any appeal to anti-war sentiment in the American, European, and Ukrainian working class, it has simply sought to mobilize Russian nationalist opposition to NATO and the Ukrainian fascist onslaught. Having watched Kiev massacre its opponents, it is now preparing its own intervention that could rapidly escalate into full-scale war.



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