Obama assures Baltic states of NATO's "eternal" assistance

Christoph Dreier
5 September 2014

On the eve of the NATO summit in Wales, US President Barack Obama assured the Baltic states of unconditional military support in a state visit to Estonia on Wednesday. His statements provided a blank cheque for military provocations against Russia, heightening the danger of a third world war.

After a meeting with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Obama invoked not only Article 5 of the NATO charter, which lays out conditions for collective military action by the alliance, but went far beyond. Assistance to the Baltic states, he declared, is "a commitment that is unbreakable. It is unwavering. It is eternal. And Estonia will never stand alone."

At the same time, Obama announced that the US is sending more troops and fighter jets to the Baltic states. These are to be stationed at the United States' Amari airbase in Estonia. The president did not name a specific number of troops. The plans must also be approved by Congress.

"Eternal" support, without limits, means unconditionally backing the Baltic regimes, which have made clear in recent weeks that they are intent on a direct military confrontation with Russia.

At the press conference with Obama, Ilves declared that immediate military support for the Ukrainian government against the pro-Russian separatists was urgently required.

His Lithuanian counterpart, Dalia Grybauskaite, declared shortly before the European Union (EU) summit last Saturday that Russia had already been at war with Europe for some time, and that it was high time that the EU retaliate militarily. "We have to support Ukraine militarily and send military supplies," demanded Grybauskaite. "Because Ukraine is today fighting a war in the name of all of Europe."

Two weeks ago, German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen also declared in an interview with weekly news magazine *Die Zeit* that "our partners in the Baltic can rely 100 percent on NATO." Germany was prepared to go to war with Russia, according to Von der Leyen.

The governments of the three small Baltic states, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, which now have a blank cheque from NATO for a war against Russia, are deeply reactionary. They have mostly been hand-picked by the NATO powers and are characterised by anti-Russian hysteria and extreme brutality towards the working class.

Officials who make up these governments are comprised of a layer of former Stalinist bureaucrats and anti-communists returned from abroad who used independence from the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism at the beginning of the 1990s to enrich themselves through the theft of former state property. They have cooperated closely with the EU and US, and have bled the working class dry.

Ilves and Grybauskaite are both typical of this milieu.

Grybauskaite joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1983 at the age of 27 and was involved from an early stage in Lithuania's drive for independence. In 1990, she travelled to Washington to complete a special course for government representatives at the School of Foreign Service.

On her return in 1991, she was heavily involved in the implementation of economic reforms, the destruction of the social welfare system and the sell-off of state property. Later, she was chief negotiator for the free trade agreement with the EU, which contained further social attacks. In 2001, she became finance minister. When Lithuania became an EU member in 2004, Grybauskaite was immediately rewarded with a lucrative post as commissioner for education and

© World Socialist Web Site

culture in Brussels. In 2009, she became president of Lithuania.

Ilves's relations with the EU and US are even closer. He grew up in the US as the son of Estonian immigrants, went to school in New Jersey, and studied at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ilves then worked at Radio Free Europe in Munich from 1983 to 1994. The radio station received significant funding from the CIA and served to transmit US propaganda into the Warsaw Pact states. Ilves led the Estonian language editorial board.

After a brief period as Estonian ambassador to the US, Canada and Mexico, Ilves became foreign minister in 1996. As part of various political formations, he also worked actively in the following years for EU membership and was rewarded with a seat in the European parliament in Strasbourg in 2004. He has been Estonian president since 2006.

Like his colleagues in Lithuania and Latvia, Ilves led an aggressive offensive against Estonian workers. When the country's economy collapsed as a consequence of the euro crisis, the government in Tallinn organised a brutal austerity programme cutting the equivalent of 8 percent of economic output. Among the measures taken were a cut in the wages for public servants of around 30 percent and major cuts to social spending. The country was thus prepared for the introduction of the euro, which followed in 2011.

Even according to Eurostat's optimistic estimates, unemployment is at 7.7 percent in Estonia, 11.5 percent in Latvia and 11.9 percent in Lithuania. Considerable numbers of highly qualified workers leave the Baltic states due to the poverty wages there in order to find work in Scandinavia. In 2012, an estimated 100,000 Estonians were working in the Nordic states alone. The Baltic states' populations are declining due to emigration and a low birth rate.

The public health care system has almost totally collapsed and is available only to wealthy citizens.

The independence of the Baltic states from the Soviet Union was not only bound up with social attacks, but also relied on the most reactionary forms of nationalism. All the Baltic regimes glorify forces that collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and fought against the Red Army.

Under Ilves, the Estonian government presented a draft law to parliament that honoured the Estonian SS volunteer unit, which was responsible for horrific crimes, as freedom fighters. After Russian protests, the draft was adopted in a milder form.

In all the Baltic states, regular marches take place to commemorate the SS. Government representatives take part. In Latvia, from 1998 to 1999, there was even an official "memorial day for the legionnaires."

After the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR, the Baltic states were founded explicitly on anti-Russian chauvinism. Laws were passed in Estonia and Latvia in the 1990s allowing only those born in the country prior to 1940 and their relatives to take up citizenship. Russians who had moved there and their children and grandchildren were declared non-citizens. They were denied the right to vote and were banned from working in the public sector.

To be accepted as a citizen, the Russians, who make up about a quarter of the population, had to take special language and history tests. This compulsory language regime has resulted in the fact that, 20 years after the transition to capitalism, one third of ethnic Russians still have no citizenship rights. They are paid worse than Latvians and get poorer jobs.

There have been repeated social protests against the discrimination in the Baltic states. Demonstrations against the demolition of a Soviet memorial in Tallinn were bloodily suppressed in 2007. One protester was killed.

Such protests could quickly be used to accuse Russia of an invasion. In mid-August, NATO's chief commander in Europe, Phillip Breedlove, made such a threat in the German daily *Die Welt*. "I want to make one thing clear: if NATO sees foreign forces creeping into its alliance territory, and we can prove that this action is from an aggressor nation, then it is article 5, collective defence that will apply," he said.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site