

US, EU intensify military threats against Russia

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The US and the European Union (EU) are escalating military threats against Russia, with NATO staging massive military exercises involving thousands of troops and warships in the Black Sea and on Russia's borders.

On Monday, NATO began a three-day military exercise in conjunction with the Ukrainian navy, called "Sea Breeze 2014," in the northwest of the Black Sea. The US Navy destroyer USS Ross, France's Commandant Birot, Canada's HMCS Toronto, and a Spanish frigate, the Almirante Juan de Borbon, are taking part alongside warships from countries including Georgia, Romania, and Turkey. While NATO cynically claimed the exercise promotes "peace and stability", it is a naked military threat against Russia, a nuclear power with a long Black Sea coast.

On Sunday, Canada's HMCS Toronto was circled and "buzzed" by a Russian surveillance plane and two fighter jets. The Canadian government criticised Russian forces for flying low over the warship. Canadian defence minister Rob Nicholson said, "The acts perpetrated by Russia were unnecessarily provocative and are likely to increase tensions further."

Calling on Russia to stop its "irresponsible actions," Nicholson said, "Canada and its allies are involved in security measures taken by the acts of military aggression perpetrated by the Putin regime and because of the invasion of Ukraine."

This is a cynical fraud. From the outset, it is NATO that stirred up conflict in Ukraine, backing the fascist-led coup that ousted pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich in February. The aim of the US and its European allies is to turn Ukraine into a forward operating base to threaten Russia with war and to use the resulting crisis to justify militarising the politics of all the NATO countries. NATO is also boosting its

military presence in eastern Europe, assembling a new rapid reaction force in response to the Ukraine crisis.

On September 1, NATO began conducting another military exercise in eastern Europe, Steadfast Javelin II, involving more than 2,000 troops from 10 nations. It took place across Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The exercise will continue until today. It focused on synchronising operations between the air and ground forces of the different NATO countries.

"This exercise is so important to maintain the high standard of interoperability," said German general Hans-Lothar Domroese. He added, "Steadfast Javelin II shows we have the capability to train and exercise and also ensure the alliance is prepared to defend its territory and their people. That's a strong signal; you can rely on NATO."

The NATO alliance is also planning to sell weapons to Ukraine, a further provocation against neighboring Russia. On Sunday, Yuri Lutsenko, a senior aide to Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko, posted a note on his Facebook page saying that Kiev had reached an agreement during the NATO summit in Wales last week that five NATO member states would provide Ukraine with weapons and military advisers.

According to Lutsenko, "At the NATO summit, agreements were reached on the provision of military advisers and supplies of modern armaments from the United States, France, Italy, Poland and Norway."

Officials from these states denied that they were arming Ukraine, citing the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member state. A senior US official told Reuters, "No U.S. offer of lethal assistance has been made to Ukraine."

NATO officials stated, however, that individual member states can choose to provide arms to Ukraine. The Polish government, which advocates an aggressive

stance against Russia, declared that it could sell weapons to Ukraine. Defence Minister Tomasz Siemoniak said, “The Ukrainian government is free to buy weapons as there is no ban on arms supplies, and if it wants to buy some weapons, Ukraine should ask Poland itself.”

In response to NATO’s massive military buildup on its border, Russia is also conducting military exercises, after Russian generals called last week for Moscow to change its nuclear doctrine to allow, as NATO doctrine does, for a pre-emptive nuclear strike.

Russia’s Interfax news agency quoted General Yuri Yakubov as saying that Russia’s 2010 military doctrine should be revised to identify the United States and NATO as enemies and specify when Russia might launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike against them. “It is necessary to hash out the conditions under which Russia could carry out a pre-emptive strike with the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces,” he said.

Yesterday, *Business Insider* also confirmed earlier reports that Russian Tu-95 “Bear” strategic bombers in the North Atlantic had practiced “runs to a pre-determined ‘launch box’—an optimum point for firing nuclear-armed cruise missiles at US targets.”

While stepping up military threats against Russia, the US and the EU are preparing to impose a new round of economic sanctions on Moscow. These include barring some Russian state-owned defence and energy companies, such as Rosneft and Transneft, and the petroleum unit of the gas company Gazprom from raising capital in the EU. The sanctions would also expand visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials.

EU governments that accused Moscow of supporting rebels in east Ukraine will meet again today to discuss a second package of economic penalties against Russia. The sanctions were initially planned to be announced today, but they were delayed for a few days, depending on the advancement of the September 5 cease-fire in east Ukraine between pro-Russian forces and the Western-backed Kiev regime.

According to initial reports, however, natural gas is not included in the new sanctions list, as EU governments rely deeply on Russia for natural gas imports.

According to Eurostat, “Russia is the EU’s biggest fuel supplier, providing the bloc with 30 percent of its gas, 35 percent of its crude oil and 26 percent of its

solid fuels.” Countries like Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania depend entirely on Russian gas, whereas France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Romania and the UK rely on around 20 percent or less of their supplies from Gazprom.

Amid the escalation of threats against Russia, EU policymakers are calling for new plans to reduce European dependency on Russian energy imports. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, “Europe’s deep dependency on Russian gas could be slashed by a third if EU leaders place a higher priority on energy efficiency savings.”

In response to the EU’s sanction, Moscow has warned that it would retaliate, including by closing Russian air space to European flights to Asia.



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