

US and NATO hold military exercises in western Ukraine, as ceasefire begins to fray in east

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On Monday, approximately 1,300 troops from 15 current and prospective NATO member states began participating in the Rapid Trident 2014 military exercise near Lviv in western Ukraine. The exercise, which lasts until September 26, will be led by the Ukrainian military.

According to the US Army, the purpose of Rapid Trident is to “promote regional stability and security, strengthen partnership capacity, and foster trust while improving interoperability,” between the US Army, the Ukrainian army and armed forces from NATO alliance members.

Participants will receive field training in countering improvised explosive devices, operating vehicle convoys and patrolling. The US Army sent at least 200 personnel to participate in the training exercises.

Organized by the US European Command based in Germany, the event has been held in western Ukraine annually since 2006. The military exercise, originally scheduled for July, was postponed when fighting broke out between Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbass region.

The decision to hold these exercises is a further provocation by the Western powers aimed at Russia. The United States and Germany supported a right-wing coup that ousted then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich after he refused to sign an association agreement with the EU in February.

The US and Germany then backed a military campaign against an anti-Kiev and pro-Russian separatist movement that emerged in the east, and have levied a series of economic sanctions against Russia for allegedly providing military support to the separatists.

In addition to Ukraine, a number of the nations

participating in the exercise share a border with Russian territory, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Poland. Armed forces from Germany, Great Britain, Canada, and Spain are also participating.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Valerey Heletey also announced that NATO countries had begun delivering weapons for use against the pro-Russian separatists. NATO officials have claimed that they are not sending arms to Ukraine, though individual member states have the right to do so.

Heletey told reporters that he had worked out the arms deals with NATO defense ministers at the summit in Wales earlier this month. The details remain a secret.

“I have no right to disclose any specific country we reached that agreement with. But the fact is that those weapons are already on the way to us—that’s absolutely true, I can officially tell you,” Heletey said.

These provocative moves take place as a tenuous ceasefire between Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine has begun to show signs of breaking down after approximately 10 days of relative quiet.

Shelling of a marketplace in the eastern city of Donetsk killed at least one woman on Saturday. The Donetsk City Council reported on Monday that at least six residents were killed by artillery fire on Monday and another 15 were severely wounded.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk told reporters on Sunday that Ukraine was “still in a stage of war” with Russia. “Russia is a threat to the global order and to the security of Europe,” he declared.

Heavy fighting has been reported over the last two days around the Donetsk airport, which is being used as

a base by Kiev forces just outside the separatist controlled city. According to Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, its troop positions at the airport were shelled on Sunday and throughout the day on Monday, though no casualties were reported.

Amidst the renewed fighting, on Monday Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko introduced legislation to the parliament that would give the Donetsk and Luhansk regions a temporary self-rule status for a period of three years. Additionally, the new law would guarantee the free use of the Russian language in eastern Ukraine.

Another significant clause would grant amnesty to anyone who fought against Ukrainian armed forces in the east, though it would not apply to those accused of "terrorism." If passed, the new law will set local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk for November 9.

Poroshenko is scheduled to meet with US President Barack Obama at the White House on Thursday. According to a White House press release, Obama will reiterate US support for Ukraine "as it pursues democracy, independence, and stability." It is expected that the Ukrainian leader will seek a closer military alliance with the United States outside of the NATO alliance and closer economic ties.

Ahead of his meeting in Washington Poroshenko will address the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa tomorrow, seeking to secure \$200 million in financial aid from the Canadian government.



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