

Poland to send troops to eastern border

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The Polish government is moving thousands of troops to its eastern frontier in a historic realignment of military forces. The move, announced last week by Defence Minister Tomasz Siemoniak, follows the NATO summit in September where the US-led alliance decided to escalate its military confrontation with Russia.

Up to now, the overwhelming majority of Poland's 120,000 soldiers have been stationed in the western half of the country. Now, thousands will be deployed to the east to military bases that are being modernised and upgraded. The capacity of three bases, including the Siedlce Air Defence Centre, is being expanded by 30 to 90 percent.

In addition, the government is planning to procure new helicopters and AGM-158 air-to-ground missiles to be used on F-16 jet fighters. In March, the US stationed 12 such aircraft in Poland.

The defence minister said the military moves were necessitated by changes in the “geo-political situation”. Speaking to the Associated Press, he said Poland found itself in the “greatest security crisis since the Cold War” and had to “draw conclusions from this.”

Siemoniak referred to events in Ukraine without mentioning that the Polish government had been intimately involved in provoking the crisis, which NATO has since used to justify a military confrontation with Russia.

In February, the anti-Russian opposition movement headed by Vitali Klitschko, Arseniy Yatsenyuk and the fascist Oleh Tyahnybok took power in Kiev and overthrew the elected president, Viktor Yanukovich. Poland was one of the prime movers in this putsch, which was encouraged and financed by the US and Germany.

The then-foreign minister, Radoslaw Sirkorski, worked intensively to push the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, with the aim of breaking

the former Soviet republic from the sphere of influence of Russia and opening it up to European investors and a military alliance with NATO.

When Yanukovich refused to sign the agreement, unleashing protests on the Maidan (Independence Square), the Polish government immediately supported the opposition movement. According to some reports, sections of the far-right extremist paramilitary groups that spearheaded the putsch were trained in Poland.

The new Ukrainian government included the fascist party Svoboda, which held three ministerial positions. The party originated in the Organisation of Independent Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with the Nazis and was responsible for countless massacres of Poles in the border areas of Volhynia and East Galicia during World War II. Today, Svoboda members still celebrate these horrific events—in which the Ukrainian fascist forces killed more than 100,000 Poles, mostly women and children, in Nazi-occupied Poland—as a great victory over the “Polish-German occupation”.

Since the Maidan events and the subsequent secession of Crimea, Poland, which joined NATO in 1999, has played a central role in the aggression towards Russia. In April, just after the referendum in Crimea, then-Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk called on NATO to station more troops in his country.

Since then, nine NATO warships have been sent to the Black Sea. In March, 600 soldiers were sent to Poland and the Baltic states. In May, military manoeuvres were held in Estonia involving 6,000 soldiers from nine NATO states. A further military exercise was held in September near Lvov in western Ukraine, which included Polish troops.

The NATO summit in Wales outlined a detailed military plan to beef up forces against Russia. The official communiqué issued at the end of September's summit called for a “continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern

part of the Alliance.”

This included the formation of a “rapid reaction force” of 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers, which could be sent to crisis regions in a few days. Since the founding document of the NATO-Russia Council in 1997 expressly proscribes the stationing of NATO troops in former Soviet republics, the troops have been kept in their barracks for the present.

In her acceptance speech on October 1, Tusk’s successor, Ewa Kopacz, said Poland would move to implement NATO demands for increased military spending. The defence budget will be increased by €190 million by 2016, bringing it up to 2 percent of gross domestic product—the target outlined by President Obama at the summit. At the same time, Kopacz called for a greater US military presence in Poland.

The country’s military policies are being closely coordinated with Germany. In March, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen attended a working meeting in Warsaw. At the NATO defence ministers’ meeting in June, held in Brussels, both countries called for increasing the staff of the North East Multinational Corps based at Stettin in Poland.

A further meeting of both ministers was held in June, where the “further intensification and development of German-Polish defence relations” was discussed, according to German officials.

Most recently, following a meeting at the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) Conference in Berlin on October 29 and 30, the Polish defence minister commented, “It is too early for tanks, air defence weapons and planes to be put in a museum”. Both countries agreed to coordinate land forces.

Behind Poland’s close alignment with German and American defence policy stands the aspiration to expand the country’s own regional influence eastward. The collaboration with the anti-Polish fascists of Svoboda and the recklessly aggressive military policy clearly show the Polish elite is prepared to do anything to this end. A military provocation by this NATO member could rapidly serve as the pretext for a cataclysmic war with nuclear-armed Russia.



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