

Russian strategic bombers to patrol off US coastlines

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14 November 2014

As fighting flares again between the NATO-backed regime in Kiev and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, Russia announced Wednesday that it is re-starting regular patrols in international air space off the US coastline by nuclear-capable strategic bombers. This is the first time since the end of the Cold War that Russia is planning routine patrols off the coast of the United States.

This is a sharp warning that the confrontation the United States and the NATO powers are waging with Russia and China—enormously escalated by the right-wing US-backed coup in Ukraine—poses the risk of world war and a nuclear conflagration.

At a meeting of Russia's national military council announcing the decision, Defense Secretary Sergei Shoigu said: “In the current situation, we have to maintain military presence in the western Atlantic and eastern Pacific, as well as the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Due to that, as part of the drills, Russian long-range bombers will conduct flights along Russian borders and over the Arctic Ocean.”

Shoigu made clear that this deployment was a response to NATO threats in the Ukraine crisis. “In many respects, this is connected with the situation in Ukraine, with fomentation of anti-Russian moods on the part of NATO and reinforcement of foreign military presence next to our border,” he explained.

The Kremlin is thought to be negotiating deals for naval or aerial resupply with countries around the world: Algeria and Cyprus in the Mediterranean; Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba in Latin America; Seychelles in the Indian Ocean; and Vietnam and Singapore in Southeast Asia.

As fighting flares in nearby Ukraine, Shoigu also announced that Russia would strengthen its forces on the Crimean peninsula. “Under these conditions, the

formation of full-fledged and self-sufficient forces on the Crimean peninsula is a priority task,” he said. He also stated that Russia's southern military district, the area of the Russian mainland bordering Ukraine, would be reinforced.

Russia's nuclear saber-rattling is utterly reactionary. Nonetheless, central responsibility for the risk of nuclear war rests with the imperialist powers of the NATO alliance.

In overthrowing Russian-backed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, the NATO powers, led by Washington and Berlin, worked directly with right-wing, Ukrainian fascist elements such as the Right Sector militia and allied reactionaries, including business oligarch Yulia Tymoshenko. In a leaked phone call the month after the coup, Tymoshenko called for the annihilation of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and the murder of Russians and Russian President Vladimir Putin. “It's about time we grab our guns and kill those scum and their leader,” she said.

Tymoshenko still enjoys NATO support, and a member of her Fatherland Party, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, is Ukraine's prime minister.

As civil war erupted in Ukraine, and NATO poured troops, warships and fighter planes into Eastern Europe—from the Baltic republics to Poland and the Black Sea—Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down under circumstances that remain unclear. The NATO powers immediately blamed the catastrophe on Russia, and the Western media whipped up a hysterical campaign that could only be interpreted as a call to war with Russia. (See: Are you ready for nuclear war?)

After months of tension, with fighting intensifying again in eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin has evidently concluded that these bellicose threats are serious, and require a Russian response aimed not only at the Kiev

regime, but also at its international backers.

While Shoigu's threat is directly aimed at the United States, Russian war planning inevitably entails preparation for strikes on major US allies: the survival of some portion of Russia's population in a war with a US-led alliance depends on destroying the nuclear weapons stationed on the soil not only of the United States, but also Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and Japan. Britain and France also maintain their own nuclear weapons.

Aerial tensions are also exploding in Europe and the Asia-Pacific. British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon told the *Wall Street Journal* that Russian military aviation was intensifying its activities in international air space around Europe.

"We've seen larger formations, going further," he said. "On October 31, we saw Russian aircraft go past Norway, past Denmark, past the UK, past Ireland, all the way down to Portugal." Fallon called the flights "intimidating and frankly dangerous."

While Russian warships are currently deployed for exercises off Australia, a tense aerial stand-off has erupted in East Asia. Recent Japanese government figures show that Tokyo scrambled fighter jets to monitor Russian military aircraft at a far higher rate this year through September than the same period in 2013—324 times, as opposed to 126. The total number of times Japanese aircraft scrambled to intercept incoming aircraft this year was at a historic high of 533.

This eruption of a major war scare between the world powers testifies to the irrationality of the nation-state system and the historic bankruptcy of capitalism.

The only way forward is the mobilization of the international working class against imperialist war and for socialism on an internationalist program. In this struggle, no support can be given to the maneuvers of the capitalist regimes in Moscow or Beijing. Representing a layer of super-rich oligarchs that emerged from the restoration of capitalism and the looting of public property, they are incapable of making any appeal to anti-war sentiment in the international proletariat.

Their policy veers between making bellicose threats, with the aim of forcing the imperialist powers to the negotiating table, and attempting to reach a deal with them as providers of oil or cheap labor to major transnational corporations. Thus, Russia has recently

tested a new Bulava intercontinental ballistic missile, and China is testing *Jin*-class ballistic missile submarines capable of launching nuclear strikes on the continental US from the Pacific Ocean.

While such weapons can play a major role in a war that would incinerate the planet, they do nothing to mobilize opposition to such a war that exists among workers internationally. Instead, they will be seized upon by the imperialist powers and their allies as a pretext to step up their denunciations and military encirclement of Russia.

Asked by the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* what he thought of "Russian hardball tactics in the air and the seas," Estonian Defense Minister Sven Mikser replied: "In a certain way, it is positive. It helps the West to remain vigilant."



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