

Kiev, NATO step up threats against Russia

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Following the attacks on Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Brisbane, fighting has intensified in eastern Ukraine. Each side has accused the other of responsibility.

The Kiev government feels strengthened by the international campaign against Putin. At the beginning of September, the US- and European Union-backed regime agreed to a ceasefire in the face of imminent military defeat at the hands of Russian-speaking separatists. Now it is adopting an increasingly bellicose approach, counting on the support of NATO members who are themselves stepping up their military and diplomatic pressure on Moscow.

On Tuesday, Kiev claimed that four of its soldiers had been killed within 24 hours. The self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk (DVR) reported 17 violations of the ceasefire by the Ukrainian army over the same period, and said at least ten civilians had been killed. In Luhansk, the separatists reported five violations of the ceasefire.

Each side accused the other of massing troops and heavy artillery. Andrei Kelin, Russia's ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), appearing on the state television program "Russia Today," said, "Troops are continually being deployed along the dividing line. This raises the suspicion that the Ukrainian side is preparing a large-scale lightning attack."

The Ukrainian Treasury confirmed that a war tax imposed over three months ago had already raised \$93 million, which is to be used to equip the army.

NATO echoed the claim of the Kiev regime that the separatists were massing troops and Russia was moving forces to its border with Ukraine. "It's about troops, material, artillery and very modern air defense systems," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday. "This represents a serious military buildup and we call on Russia to withdraw its

troops," he added.

After a meeting in Moscow with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier described the situation in Ukraine as a "really serious crisis for peace in Europe." He continued: "We are at something of a crossroads. Twenty-five years after the fall of the wall, we once again face silence instead of dialogue...confrontation rather than cooperation."

Earlier, in Kiev, Steinmeier spoke of a "direct large-scale military confrontation." Following a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Steinmeier said, "The security situation is precarious, the truce is fragile, and the mood has intensified in recent days."

In Moscow, he declared, "There is no reason for optimism in the current situation." He called on the parties in the conflict to implement last September's Minsk agreement, which envisaged a ceasefire and autonomy for eastern Ukraine.

Steinmeier's remarks followed an extremely aggressive speech in Sydney by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who laid the entire blame for the escalation of violence on Russia and said it would be a mistake to be "too peaceable."

The Kremlin made clear that it saw the aggressive moves by NATO as a threat to its security. Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for Putin, told the BBC: "We want our counterparts to know we have our red lines and they can't cross these lines."

Peskov said the Western states had organized a coup d'état in Ukraine and violated Russian security interests. The country was surrounded and therefore demanded a guarantee that Ukraine would not join NATO. Russia felt threatened and would accordingly take precautions.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko also said his country could not reconcile itself with the "activities of Western countries." At a Tuesday

meeting with Lavrov in Minsk, he said, “The situation on our western borders worries us.”

In recent days, the regime in Kiev that was brought to power in a coup last February has escalated the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Both President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk have categorically ruled out fresh negotiations with the separatists.

Instead, Yatsenyuk demanded talks with Russia involving both the US and the EU. “We will not hold direct negotiations with Russian terrorists,” he said. Russia, however, is insisting that the rebels be involved in any new negotiations.

Last Saturday, the Ukrainian president ordered a halt to his government’s support for all public services in areas controlled by the rebels. This means supplies will be halted to schools, hospitals and emergency services. Beginning in December, energy will be supplied only on the basis of advance payment. The National Bank will cease cooperation with commercial banks in the rebellious region.

Yatsenyuk had already announced last week that benefits would not be paid. “If parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are controlled by fraudsters, then the government will no longer send money to the area,” he declared.

These decisions compel the separatists to create their own state structures to provide for the region, which in turn creates a pretext for war. Tuesday’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* quoted NATO Supreme Commander Philip M. Breedlove, who is in direct contact with the regime in Kiev, accusing the separatists of “making a more clearly integrated and delineated territory from the areas they control.”

Breedlove added that NATO’s planned rapid response force, which will include up to 5,000 troops, will be provisionally operational as early as 2015.

The withdrawal of all state-employed workers from eastern Ukraine creates the conditions for a major offensive by the Ukrainian army. On Sunday, Poroshenko threatened Russia with “total war,” saying, “I’m not afraid of war with Russian troops and we have prepared for the scenario of a total war.”



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