

UK joins US, Poland in sending military trainers to Ukraine

Jean Shaoul**26 February 2015**

Prime Minister David Cameron announced that Britain is to send military “advisors” and “nonlethal aid” to Ukraine. The purpose, according to defence sources, is to “improve the survivability” of Ukrainian troops who have taken a beating from separatist forces in the east of the country.

The move is widely seen as a bid by Cameron in the run up-to the general election in May to counter criticism from the military and political establishment that Britain has become virtually invisible on the international arena. A parliamentary committee denounced the government for not being “active or visible enough” in dealing with the situation in Ukraine.

More crucially, it signifies that Washington and London are determined to arm Ukraine, up the ante against Russia, and further undermine the ceasefire agreed between Russia, France, Germany and the Ukrainian regime at Minsk earlier this month.

Britain’s deployment of a training force coincides with the deployment of a US battalion to train Ukrainian battalions, and expectations that other NATO countries will follow suit.

After the US announcement that it could directly arm the right-wing regime in Kiev at the beginning of the month, leading European officials publicly acknowledged that the world was on the verge of “total” war between NATO and Russia. London is joining the US and Polish governments in aggressively arming Ukraine and stoking the risk of world war.

Polish Defence Ministry official Boguslaw Pacek announced yesterday that Warsaw would send military advisors to help train Ukrainian non-commissioned officers.

The Ukrainian government is also trying to obtain military support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE),

a key US ally in the Middle East.

US Secretary of State John Kerry accused Russia of backing the separatists and failing to abide by the Minsk ceasefire, though he admitted that there had been a lull in the fighting. “To date, neither Russia nor the forces it is supporting have come close to complying with their commitments,” he said, renewing warnings that Moscow would face further sanctions.

Cameron promised, “What we need to do now is deliver the strongest possible message to Putin and to Russia that what has happened is unacceptable. These ceasefires need to hold and if they don’t, there’ll be more consequences, more sanctions, more measures.”

Shortly afterwards, Royal Air Force jets were scrambled to escort two Russian military aircraft seen off the Cornwall coast, although both the prime minister and Defence Secretary Michael Fallon acknowledged that they had not entered British airspace.

Britain will be sending 75 trainers to western Ukraine in the next few weeks to provide instruction in command procedures, tactical intelligence, battlefield first aid, logistics, and the planning and execution of urban operations. They will also assess the training needs of the army’s infantry.

While Britain has deployed troops as part of NATO exercises in Ukraine, this is the first explicit British mission there.

Fallon denied that this was the beginning of a wider deployment of troops and claimed that there would be no mission creep. “We are not deploying combat troops to Ukraine and we will not do so,” he said, adding: “We should come to the help of a friend in need.”

In the next breath, however, he acknowledged that his officials were looking at what other training might be needed, in addition to that announced on Tuesday.

He also said that the Ukrainian government had requested all kinds of military equipment, but insisted that “at this stage” any British military supplies would be “nonlethal,” an indication that heavy weaponry as well as “nonlethal” supplies are indeed being actively considered.

Cameron called on the European Union to examine wide-ranging sanctions on Russia’s economy, which is already on the rocks due to the fall in oil prices.

His move to send British troops to Ukraine has the Labour Party’s support, according to Shadow Defence Minister Kevan Jones. In what amounted to a call for stepped-up intervention, he asked how the plan accorded with “broader NATO strategy” on Ukraine, and “what the overall objective of the deployment is and how long has it been in the planning.”

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko also signed a deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for military and technical cooperation while attending the IDEX military trade fair in Abu Dhabi.

In the wake of the virtual secession of the eastern manufacturing belt of the country following the Berlin and Washington-backed fascist-led coup a year ago, Ukraine has been forced to find new suppliers for its armed forces. Poroshenko said that Ukrainian companies had signed contracts worth tens of millions of dollars to accelerate the modernisation of its armed forces.

The UAE is the fourth-largest arms purchaser in the world, buying mainly from the US and to a lesser extent, France. Thus, any military deal between Ukraine and the UAE must have US approval.

The semi-feudal Gulf monarchy that presides over a migrant labour force forced to live in slave-like conditions is—in terms of arms per capita—the most heavily armed country on the planet. It has tried to build up its own defence manufacturing capacity and taken an increasingly open military role, sending forces to Kosovo and Afghanistan, and carrying out airstrikes in Libya, Iraq and Syria.

Speaking to reporters at the IDEX trade show, Poroshenko said that he hoped that Washington would agree to provide arms to Ukraine. He had reportedly planned to meet chief Pentagon weapons buyer Frank Kendall at the show.

He said of his talks with Washington, “We are in a very practical dialogue, and we hope in the very near

future, we have a decision to help us attain defensive weapons.”



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