

Russia scrambles jets against US destroyer in Black Sea

Alex Lantier
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Russian jets intercepted the US guided missile destroyer USS Ross off the Russian coast in the Black Sea on Saturday, according to reports in the Russian media. The US ship allegedly steamed along the edge of Russian territorial waters, then set a course that would have taken it into Russian waters—a situation that could have provoked a military clash between Russian and US forces.

“The crew of the ship acted provocatively and aggressively, which concerned the operators of monitoring stations and ships of the Black Sea fleet. Scrambled Su-24 attack jets demonstrated a readiness to forcibly suppress border violations and defend the country’s interest,” Russian military sources told news agency RIA Novosti.

Su-24 attack jets were scrambled to intercept the USS Ross, which then suddenly changed course. “Apparently, the Americans have not forgotten the April 2014 incident when one Su-24 practically ‘blacked out’ all of the electronics on board the newest American destroyer Donald Cook,” the source added.

The significance of statements that the Russian military is prepared to forcibly suppress violations of Russian territorial waters by US warships is both unmistakable and terrifying. Since last year’s NATO-backed putsch in Kiev, escalating NATO military deployments and exercises along Russia’s borders in Eastern Europe and over neighboring waters are placing the world on the edge of a shooting war between nuclear-armed powers.

With truly staggering recklessness, NATO is deploying warships and warplanes to the Arctic, Baltic, and Black Seas surrounding Russia. (See: Global tensions surge as NATO, Russia hold rival military exercises). This creates a situation where minor navigational miscalculations could lead to the sinking

of a US warship, a US missile strike on Russian soil, followed by an escalation of conflict into war between powers whose nuclear arsenals are capable of destroying the world many times over.

The Pentagon confirmed that the Black Sea incident had taken place, adding that the USS Ross’ deployment to the region had been publicly announced. Spokeswoman Eileen Lainez said the USS Ross had been “well within international waters at all times, performing routine operations.”

Speaking on Saturday at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov warned that the deployment of US guided missile ships near Russian borders “pose a danger to strategic stability” between the two countries.

This is a euphemism for the risk of war between Russia and the United States. Earlier this year, as Washington threatened to arm the Kiev regime and its far-right militias to fight Russian-backed separatists in east Ukraine, European politicians publicly pointed to the risk of war between Russia and NATO. French President François Hollande warned of the risk of “total war,” and former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt called war with Russia “conceivable.”

It is ever clearer, however, that the threat of nuclear war with Russia is an integral part of NATO’s strategy in Eastern Europe.

After Obama provided the tiny Baltic republics with open-ended guarantees of US aid against Russia last year, the incoming head of the NATO Military Committee, Czech General Petr Pavel, made clear last week that the only viable strategy for NATO to offer aid to the Baltics was to prepare for a global war with Russia, including possibly the use of nuclear weapons.

“From a technical point of view, if I consider how

many forces Russia is able to deploy in the Baltics, the size of the Baltic countries, and the density of forces on their territories, the Baltics could be occupied in a couple of days,” Pavel told the Czech News Agency on May 27. According to Pavel, the measures NATO was preparing would prove “embarrassingly ineffective” to counter a full-scale Russian offensive in the Baltics.

Pavel made clear that, given Russia’s overwhelming local military superiority in the Baltics, the only effective strategy for NATO would be to threaten to escalate the war to a much broader conflict, including by threatening to use nuclear weapons.

“A different question is how effective the deterrence element, represented by NATO’s Article 5 and its nuclear component, would be in relation to Russia,” Pavel said.

Such ratcheting up of tensions, carried out by cabals of officers and spies entirely behind the backs of working people around the world, is stunningly irresponsible. Assuming that it is not the purpose of NATO leaders to provoke a nuclear war with Russia, these remarks seem to be designed to intimidate Russia into backing down in what has become a regional confrontation over Ukraine and Eastern Europe with global implications.

The military officials making these threats have no way of knowing how Russian forces will react, however, and whether they will back down or also choose the path of escalation, with potentially catastrophic consequences. Already, according to a report by the European Leadership Network last year, at least 40 incidents have almost provoked military clashes between NATO and Russian forces since NATO escalation began in Eastern Europe after the Kiev putsch. This weekend’s Black Sea incident makes clear that this risk is rising.

The military tensions in Eastern Europe are an indictment of the bankruptcy of the international social order. When he said in February that war with Russia was possible, Carl Bildt declared that the situation was so explosive because of the “uncertainty about global power relations.”

That is, the crisis of US and European imperialism—both externally, as they have escalated military interventions across Eurasia and Africa in the 25 years since the dissolution of the USSR, and

internally, as their economies collapsed after the 2008 financial crisis—has reached the point where they are threatening to launch World War III. Masses of workers risk being dragged into a horrific war, in which they have no interest whatsoever.

The critical task facing the working class is to mobilize itself in struggle against capitalism, imperialism, and war. It can give no support to the corrupt business oligarchy in Moscow that emerged from the restoration of capitalism in the USSR in 1991. The Kremlin oscillates between attempts to work out a deal with imperialism and aggressive military maneuvers—such as ongoing bomber flights in airspace off Japan, Gibraltar, Crete, and California—that serve only to heighten the risk of war.



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