

US to station troops, heavy weaponry on Russia's border

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In a brazen move to prepare for war with Russia, the United States is planning to permanently station battle tanks and other heavy weaponry and maintain a force of up to 5,000 US troops in the Baltic States and other Eastern European NATO countries that were once part of the Soviet Union or its periphery.

The move, first reported over the weekend by the *New York Times*, was confirmed Sunday by the Polish Defense Ministry, which said that it is negotiating a plan with Washington to deploy American heavy weaponry on Polish soil. Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak indicated that he had discussed the plan last month with military officials in Washington and had been assured that a decision would be made soon.

The pre-positioning of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armored howitzers and other instruments of war is an immense escalation of the US-led drive to compel Russia to accept American domination of Eurasia and its own reduction to semicolonial status. It brings the entire region, already bristling with arms, to the brink of war, threatening the entire world with a nuclear holocaust.

Whatever the timetable for war being discussed by the Pentagon and CIA madmen who formulate US policy, the stationing of US weapons and troops in the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), as well as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and possibly Hungary, dramatically heightens the potential for a relatively minor incident to escalate rapidly into a full-scale war.

Led by the US, NATO is already carrying out military exercises all along Russia's western border, from the Arctic Ocean to the Baltic and Black seas. NATO is developing a rapid deployment force designed to intervene against Russia in a matter of days. Scores of incidents between NATO and Russian planes and ships have already occurred.

The latest reported incident took place just last Thursday, when, according to a Pentagon statement

released Saturday, a Russian military surveillance plane buzzed four NATO warships in the Baltic Sea. One of the vessels was the US destroyer Jason Dunham. The other ships were British, French and German.

At the same time, Washington and its NATO allies are financing and arming an ultra-right, rabidly anti-Russian regime in Kiev that is prosecuting a bloody civil war against Russian-speaking regions in eastern Ukraine.

All the post-Soviet governments set to receive US arms and troops are right-wing, anti-Russian and highly unstable. They are beset by internal crises, as they carry out brutal austerity policies in the face of popular opposition. This heightens the danger of a provocation being staged to provoke Russian retaliation and create a pretext for war.

The *Times* quotes Raimonds Vejonis, Latvia's minister of defense, who will become the country's president in July, as saying, "If something happens, we can't wait days or weeks for more equipment. We need to react immediately."

By stationing weapons and troops and pledging to intervene militarily against Russia to defend these governments, US imperialism is placing the fate of the people of America and the entire world in immense danger. It is being done, moreover, entirely behind the backs of the population, without public discussion or debate and without even the formality of congressional authorization (which would be forthcoming if demanded by the military).

Last September, at the time of the NATO summit in Wales, President Obama went to Estonia and gave an unqualified commitment to use American troops to defend the Baltic States against the supposed threat from Russia. "As NATO allies," he declared, "we have Article 5 duties to our collective defense. That is a commitment that is unbreakable. It is unwavering. It is eternal."

He stressed that the commitment included the use of

“American boots on the ground.”

The *Times* article, which is supportive of the American plan, makes clear that it marks a major escalation of the US-led offensive against Russia. The newspaper writes: “It would be the most prominent of a series of moves the United States and NATO have taken to bolster forces in the region and send a clear message of resolve to allies and to Russia’s president, Vladimir V. Putin, that the United States would defend the alliance’s members closest to the Russian frontier.”

The *Times* implies that the plan, expected to be formally approved by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and the Obama White House prior to a meeting of NATO ministers later this month, violates the 1997 agreement between Russia and NATO (the NATO Russia Founding Act) that gave Moscow guarantees against the alliance’s eastward expansion being used to militarily threaten Russia.

Those guarantees included a NATO pledge not to seek permanent stationing of military forces in Eastern European countries formerly in the Soviet sphere of influence. The newspaper writes: “The agreement also says that ‘NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries.’ Many in the alliance argue that Russia’s increasingly aggressive actions around NATO’s border have made that pact effectively moot.”

According to the *Times* account, based on information provided by unnamed “American and allied officials,” the plan provides for equipment supplying a company of some 150 troops to be stored in each of the Baltic countries, and sufficient military hardware for a battalion—about 750 soldiers—to be located in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and possibly Hungary.

“A full brigade’s worth of equipment—formally called the European Security Set—would include about 1,200 vehicles, including some 250 M1-A2 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and armored howitzers, according to a senior military official,” the article states.

“This is a very meaningful shift in policy,” said James G. Stavridis, a retired admiral and the former supreme allied commander of NATO. Indicating further steps that are under discussion, he continues, “It provides a reasonable level of reassurance to jittery allies, although nothing is as good as troops stationed full-time on the ground, of course.”

Ominously, the article compares the plan to US military moves at the height of the Cold War and before the invasion of Iraq. It compares the pre-positioning of heavy weapons in Eastern Europe to the Berlin Brigade that was

dispatched during the Berlin Wall crisis of 1961, and to the US presence in Kuwait that prepared the way for the 2003 war.

The *Times* presents Washington’s reckless escalation as a defensive measure to “deter possible Russian aggression in Europe.” This turns reality on its head.

In fact, the aggressors are the US and NATO. The current crisis was triggered by the Maidan coup of February 2014 that toppled the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich.

The coup was orchestrated by Washington and Berlin and spearheaded by fascist militias that venerate Ukrainian nationalist forces that collaborated with the Nazi occupation and anti-Jewish genocide in World War II. When Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the east of the country rose up in opposition to the ultra-right regime in Kiev, the US puppet government launched a bloody civil war with the full support of Washington.

The coup itself was the culmination of US imperialist policy since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which has centered on a relentless drive to isolate, weaken and surround Russia in order to bring the vast resources of Eurasia under US domination.

This has included the eastward expansion of NATO to encompass the former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltic States. It has involved a series of aggressive actions and wars against Russia’s allies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, including the first Gulf War (1991) against Iraq, the breakup of Yugoslavia and war against Serbia (1999), the so-called “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine (2003-2004), the Georgian attack on Russian forces (2008), the sanctions and war threats against Iran, and the US-backed civil war against the Syrian regime.



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