

NATO rapid reaction force exercises in Poland target Russia

Christoph Dreier**22 June 2015**

Last Wednesday, NATO conducted mock combat operations in Poland as part of the “Noble Jump” exercise. The manoeuvres were observed by leading representatives of the military and political establishment.

The build-up of troops in Eastern Europe is a flagrant provocation against Russia, increasing the risk of a war in Europe that could lead to a confrontation between nuclear armed powers.

Noble Jump is the first exercise of the so-called NATO Spearhead Force, a rapid reaction unit that was approved at the NATO summit in Wales in the autumn of 2014. Approximately 5,000 soldiers from various NATO countries are part of the force that is able to mobilize within a few days for combat under Dutch and German leadership.

The military exercise included the short-notice relocation of more than 2,000 heavily armed soldiers from nine NATO countries to a military training camp near the western Polish city of Zagan in just five days.

Zagan then became the site of a combat exercise, which mirrored the current situation in eastern Ukraine down to the last detail. NATO troops engaged in training to counter the kind of warfare waged by the pro-Russian separatists against the Kiev regime in eastern Ukraine.

A vast number of diverse military units assembled for the major manoeuvre. In addition to 440 wheeled and caterpillar-type vehicles, 65 combat helicopters and US F-16 fighter jets were deployed.

The exercises in Poland are part of a series of major exercises that will be happening in various eastern and southern European countries until the end of June, involving approximately 15,000 troops from 19 countries.

Far more extensive exercises are planned to take place in Eastern Europe this autumn. Manoeuvres involving 10,000 soldiers from 18 countries are scheduled to be launched in Poland alone. This amounts to a 40 percent increase in the number of troops that took part last year.

The continuous military exercises constitute a de facto stationing of NATO troops in Eastern Europe. Such a concentration of troops is strictly proscribed by the NATO-Russia Council’s founding act of 1994. The quasi-permanent stationing of NATO forces via constantly rotating manoeuvres is therefore an enormous provocation in itself. With the obvious targeting of the manoeuvres Russia cannot but regard it as an open threat, increasing the danger of war in Europe.

Numerous politicians and members of the military used the multimedia spectacle of the large-scale manoeuvre in Zagan to promote the upgrading of NATO and the further intensification of the drive for war against Russia. In addition to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the defence ministers of Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway were seated in the public stand.

German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) expressly supported US plans to deploy heavy military equipment, such as tanks and canons, which could accommodate as many as 5,000 troops in the Baltic countries close to Russia’s western border.

Von der Leyen considered the deployment to be “an appropriate defensive measure”. She said that because the US is “geographically very far away,” it would have to “bring troops and equipment to Europe” to be able to participate in the NATO rapid reaction force. The NATO defence ministers are scheduled to meet in Brussels next Wednesday and will be discussing these plans, among other things.

In line with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, von der Leyen also assured the Baltic states of Germany’s steadfast support in the event of conflict with Russia. “There can be no doubt about the solidarity existing within the Atlantic Alliance,” she said in the Estonian capital of Tallinn on Tuesday, following a meeting with Estonian Minister of Defence Sven Mikser. “That means

we too will hold unswervingly to Article 5,” she added.

Von der Leyen thereby gave these countries’ corrupt and belligerently anti-Russian regimes a blank check for every possible kind of provocation. She also committed Germany to wage war on Russia on behalf of the Baltic states, even if the party responsible for the outbreak of hostilities remained unclear.

NATO General Hans-Lothar Domröse, German commander of the NATO troops in Eastern Europe, spoke more to the point in an interview with *Die Welt* daily. He called for “a resolute bolstering of armaments for the Baltic states and NATO allies in the east”. He said that financially strong NATO countries should provide their poorer neighbours with “helicopters, howitzers, armoured anti-aircraft missile systems and heavy combat equipment” at exceptionally favourable prices, so that they would be able “to react quickly to a threat from Russia”.

The general reveals just how far preparations for a war against Russia have already advanced. “In a first wave, we will establish permanent staffs in six eastern European and Baltic states, each 40-men strong and with officers from up to 20 countries,” Domröse explains.

“These front-line staffs will see to it that NATO reinforcement troops, like NATO’s new rapid reaction force, can enter a country smoothly in an emergency. In a second wave, NATO will probably install further staffs in other countries—such as Hungary, Slovakia and Greece—to signal deterrence potential and defence preparedness”, Domröse said. NATO plans to station munitions and set up light command posts at the new bases.

Domröse and von der Leyen expressed their aggressive intentions towards Russia in a place that evokes grim memories of the historical crimes of German imperialism. The military training area at Zagan was established in the early 20th century in a region administered at the time by Germany, and used before each of the two world wars by the German army. Nazi General Erwin Rommel prepared his regiments here before the North African campaign.

In May 1942, a major Luftwaffe air base and a POW camp run by the army were set up in a forest near the town. Some 50 prisoners of war, recaptured after attempting to escape, were shot in cold blood by a Gestapo unit, following Hitler’s so-called “Sagan (Zagan) order” of April 1944.

In the course of two world wars, German imperialism tried to crush and subjugate Russia and Eastern Europe with unprecedented brutality. Seventy years after the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship, German troops are again

training in Zagan for war against Russia.

The German Federal Republic does not merely participate in the manoeuvres; it plays a central role in directing NATO’s European operations. Along with the Netherlands, it heads the NATO Spearhead Force and contributed 350 soldiers and about 100 vehicles to the exercises. It has exploited the confrontation with Russia to massively upgrade German military forces.

“I welcome the fact that Germany is increasingly assuming a leadership role in NATO and taking its role as a leading nation more and more seriously,” said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg from the sidelines of the manoeuvre.” The German contribution has been critical for achieving the rapidity of deployment, for which the task force was established, he added. Stoltenberg also welcomed the fact that “Germany’s spending on defence will no longer be cut back, but will increase from 2016”.

The federal government announced last March that the defence budget would be increased over the next four years by €6 billion. Since then, it has passed legislation on arms contracts amounting to more than €15 billion.

Inspector of the German army Lieutenant General Bruno Kasdorf told *Die Welt* that the army still requires much more upgrading if it wants to fulfil the commitments it made to the NATO Spearhead Force. Among the required equipment were “battle tanks, infantry combat vehicles, armoured personnel carriers, artillery, sapper bridges, shielded SUVs, munitions and personal equipment for soldiers.” Kasdorf estimated that this would involve an additional cost of at least €20 billion for the army alone.



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