

NATO incorporates Montenegro, escalating anti-Russian front in Balkans

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NATO officially approved Montenegro for membership on Wednesday, marking the first expansion of the US-dominated military alliance's membership in more than six years.

Montenegro's integration is part of a broader drive to bring the Balkans under the umbrella of NATO, General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday. Its membership marks "an important step in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the entire Western Balkans region," Stoltenberg said.

While praising Montenegro for "establishing sovereignty" and "consolidating its democratic institutions," Stoltenberg also made clear that further economic and political restructuring will be necessary as part of its incorporation into the NATO political-military network. "The accession process is challenging. It demands continued reforms, especially to further strengthen the rule of law and to fight corruption," Stoltenberg said.

With some 2,000 troops, the addition of Montenegro's military to NATO cannot be said to represent a significant shift in the regional balance of military power. Nonetheless, the integration of the tiny Adriatic state into the Western military bloc has definite significance in the context of the escalating pressure campaign directed against Russia.

It is intended as a threat against Moscow and a signal that NATO intends to undermine any residual Russian influence in the Balkans. Further provocations loom as NATO prepares to extend its influence in the region, including potential membership for other ex-Yugoslav states, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Russian officials have responded to the announcement by noting that the move is part of broader efforts to encircle and lay siege to Russia. "The continuing expansion of NATO, of the military

infrastructure of NATO to the east, can only lead to retaliatory measures from the east, from the Russian side, in terms of guaranteeing the security and maintaining a parity of interests," Russian government spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in response to Wednesday's announcement.

"They [NATO] are ready to admit even the North Pole to NATO just for the sake of encircling Russia," Duma military committee chair Vladimir Komoyedov said.

In contrast to their Russian counterparts, the ex-Stalinist cadre that continue to dominate political life in Montenegro have enthusiastically endorsed the decision. Igor Lukšić, Montenegro foreign minister and director of "European integration," gushed that the move was "humbling and exciting."

"By opening your door to Montenegro, both literally and symbolically, you have shown why this alliance is so vital and strong," Lukšić said.

This endorsement demonstrates the reactionary role of the nationalist ruling strata throughout the former Yugoslavia, who have increasingly turned to open collaboration with imperialism since the 1980s.

During the following decade, the nominally "socialist" Yugoslav federation, established by a mass partisan movement in opposition to the Nazi occupation, was progressively dismembered, as the imperialist powers seized on the break-up of the USSR to carry through the restoration of capitalist property and for-profit commodity production throughout Eastern Europe.

Under intensifying pressure from the US and European ruling classes, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia broke with the Yugoslav federation during the early 1990s, a process that was helped along in 1994-95 by a NATO air war and dispatch of ground troops.

The US-led smash-up of the former Yugoslavia reached its violent climax in 1999, when NATO forces carried out an even larger bombing campaign, destroying large sections of Serbia's social infrastructure and bringing Russia and NATO to the brink of all-out war. Direct clashes between NATO and Russian troops were averted only when European officers under the command of US General Wesley Clark refused to carry out Clark's orders to attack the Russian forces in Kosovo.

As intended, the US-led war accelerated the breakup of Serbia, setting the stage for Montenegro's formal declaration of independence, issued in 2006. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted at the time, "independence" left the small republic "entirely at the mercy of the major global corporations and international financial organizations."

Just two years later, Kosovo's own declaration of independence once again posed the imminent possibility of a direct NATO-Russian war, as US-backed Georgian forces seized on Russian countermeasures to launch an invasion of disputed areas of the Caucasus.

The NATO absorption of Montenegro comes amid unprecedented tensions between Russia and the NATO powers over Ukraine and Syria, and amid the militarization of large stretches of Russia's eastern and southern frontiers.

The imperialist offensive has been abetted by the active collaboration of the Stalinist elites throughout the former USSR and Yugoslavia. These layers have transformed themselves into capitalist oligarchies while overseeing the plundering of state-controlled wealth that had been accumulated behind the anti-imperialist political bulwarks thrown up by the mass struggles of the working class and oppressed masses during the 20th century.

In his remarks Wednesday, Secretary Stoltenberg openly acknowledged that NATO's integration of Montenegro was intended to intensify the strategic pressure being imposed upon Moscow. Discussions with Russia can only be pursued in combination with continuous pressure and military escalation, characterized euphemistically by Stoltenberg as "deterrence."

"There is a strong message from all allies that there is no contradiction between a strong defense, deterrence

and political dialogue," said NATO general secretary Stoltenberg. "As long as we provide deterrence, we can engage in political dialogue. That is the only way."



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