

Naval buildup in Black Sea escalates US-Russian tensions

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The Russian government announced Tuesday that Russia's Navy would reinforce its naval presence in the highly strategic Black Sea. The new deployments come in response to the buildup of US and NATO forces, Moscow says.

According to a Russian officer who spoke to *Novaya Gazeta*, the deployment of additional warplanes and missile batteries, together with Russian forces in the Caucasus, will effectively cancel the danger posed by NATO's own increased military presence in the Black Sea.

The Russian deployments have been played up in Washington as representing a grave threat to US naval superiority.

In comments to the National Press Club, US Chief of Naval Operations John Richardson declared: "The Russians just put out a maritime strategy which is very forward-leaning. We must respond to that threat."

"The Russian Navy is operating at a frequency and pace not seen for more than two decades," Richardson said. "This is great power competition."

As part of the US Navy's "Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority," US officials have been coordinating strategy in the region with governments along the Mediterranean and Black Seas, Richardson said.

Late December saw media warnings of supposedly dangerous upgrades to the Russian Navy, as US Naval Intelligence issued a report, "The Russian Navy: A Historic Transition." The US Navy warned that better naval technology will now enable Russia to "more capably defend the maritime approaches of the Russian Federation," and provide Moscow with "forward-layered defense of Russia and its maritime exclusive economic zone." According to the US Navy, Moscow seeks to "project power regionally and advance

President Putin's stated goal of returning Russia to clear great power status."

Russian forces now possess "the ability to really disrupt access into the Black Sea," US General Ben Hodges, the commander of US Army Europe, warned in December.

In reality, the imperialist powers and their regional allies are the ones responsible for the ever growing danger of a military confrontation between the West and Russia. Moscow's decision to send more forces to the Black Sea is a predictable response to the efforts of the Western powers to impose maritime strangulation against Russia.

The closure of Black Sea shipping lanes by a US-NATO blockade would mean the disruption of oil exports and other commercial flows that are desperately needed by Russia's government and ruling elite, under conditions where falling oil prices are already straining Moscow's budget. Indeed, a main purpose of the US-fomented crisis in Ukraine and ensuing struggle over Crimea has been to deprive Russia of access to the Black Sea.

While the relentless militarism being pursued by Washington has compelled Russia to expand its operations, the US government is by far the leading instigator of violence and warfare globally. Russia's own military operations are dwarfed by those of Washington.

Russia's bombing campaign in Syria and stepped up troop deployments to hot spots from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including upcoming joint drills by Russian and allied forces in the Black Sea and ground forces in the Caucasus, have been driven by relatively defensive considerations. They are largely aimed at reinforcing Russia's southern flank against Western-backed destabilization operations.

The US-NATO military buildup in the Black Sea emerges from the broader geo-strategic aims of US imperialism to impose its hegemony over all of Eurasia and to eliminate Russia as a potential regional rival. Talk of “Russian imperialism” is intended to obscure this reality and provide ideological cover for the US war drive.

Since February 2014, when US and German-backed fascist forces spearheaded the February 2014 coup in Kiev, Eastern Europe has been transformed into a NATO war camp.

NATO has continuously built up its presence in the following period, announcing another major expansion of its command and control infrastructure in Eastern Europe, including the formation of new NATO sub-headquarters in Poland, Romania, the Baltic states and Bulgaria, in September 2015.

The Polish government has emerged, along with a handful of US-backed right-wing regimes in Eastern Europe, as a spearhead of the war drive against Moscow. On Monday, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Polish and NATO officials were discussing the deployment of additional NATO troops to Poland on a permanent basis. In remarks from Brussels, Polish President Andrzej Duda called for troop deployments and pre-placement of weapons in Poland and across a broader section of central and eastern Europe.

“Today everything suggests that we need a significant presence of infrastructure and of troops there, on the ground, in central and eastern Europe. We need a good system of support for these forces,” Duda said, essentially demanding the permanent occupation of these countries by NATO armies.

Playing a similar role, Romania’s government called Tuesday for a permanent NATO Black Sea Force, to include naval forces drawn from Romania, Germany, Italy, Turkey and the United States.



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