

Polish government intensifies military build-up

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In the lead-up to the NATO summit in Warsaw this July, Poland's new right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government is seeking the installation of permanent NATO bases in the country. Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, and the minister of defence, Antoni Macierewicz, claim that "strengthening the eastern flank of NATO" is the main political goal of their current government. Simultaneously, the government is taking steps to build up the military as well as paramilitary units.

President Duda, who was elected last May, already announced in an interview with the *Financial Times* last summer that a permanent stationing of NATO troops in Poland was one of his key goals (see "Poland rearms against Russia").

After meeting with Duda in Brussels last week, NATO's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, signaled support for those demands. He said, "I trust that after the Warsaw Summit, we will see more NATO in Poland than ever before." Installing permanent military bases in Poland would mean an aggressive provocation against Russia. Last summer, the previous Polish government had also signaled interest in hosting US nuclear arms.

Instigating such a move against Russia has the potential of igniting a military conflict on a global scale. In a document entitled "About the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation," which was signed by Russian president Vladimir Putin on New Year's Eve, the Russian government and military described NATO and the United States as threats to national security.

The move is also likely to increase the already high tensions with Germany, which has long been opposed to the permanent stationing of NATO troops in Poland.

In addition to Stoltenberg's declaration on NATO's intentions to station troops in Poland, British defence secretary Michael Fallon pledged to deploy 1,000 British troops to join a Polish Very High Readiness Joint Task Force in 2020. After meeting Fallon in Edinburgh on

January 20, Polish defence minister Macierewicz stated that British troops will be stationed in his country permanently. Also, the warship Iron Duke and the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean will visit Poland as part of NATO's Standing Naval Maritime Group this year.

The commitment comes amid discussions over Britain's possible exit from the European Union (EU) and Poland's opposition to Britain's proposal on limiting the rights of immigrants. David Cameron's government wants immigrants from the EU to be eligible for unemployment and child benefits only after a four-year work period. An estimated 700,000 Poles live and work in the UK, forming Britain's largest immigrant community.

Polish foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski stated in an interview with the German tabloid *Bild* that his country was ready for a compromise on this issue if, in exchange, Britain would agree to increase its military presence in Poland.

Simultaneously, the government is escalating efforts to build up the Polish military. Under the former government, Poland declared 2 percent of its GDP to be spent annually on defence as part of country's 140 billion z?oty (€33 billion) military modernisation programme, one of the largest rearmament investments by any European NATO member.

The new prime minister, Beata Szyd?o, has declared the government's readiness to raise the amount to 3 percent of the country's GDP. Defence Minister Macierewicz has also ordered a thorough audit of the Polish army, claiming the PO-PSL government did not do enough to ensure Poland's military security.

The Ministry of National Defence (MON) and the general staff of the Polish army are working on developing a new model for the country's territorial defence. According to Macierewicz, three quarters of Poland's territory is vulnerable to Iskander missile attack, short-range ballistic weaponry used by the Russian army.

Last April, the Civic Platform (PO)-Polish People's Party (PSL) government made plans to buy the US-made Patriot anti-missile system and 50 French-made Caracal helicopters—a deal worth an estimated €8 billion.

The PiS has called this choice into question, declaring its preference towards supporting a domestic arms manufacturing industry. Developing its own military supply facilities would make Poland independent from foreign, especially Russian, sources.

A key component of the PiS military build-up is the arming and promotion of paramilitary militias. The MON is planning to equip them with heavy weaponry, turning them into a national defence army, called Voluntary Home Army, that is modeled after the National Guard in the United States.

After backing the right-wing coup in Kiev in February 2014, the former government of the PO and the PSL supported arming Ukrainian far-right paramilitary units and, at the same time, backed the incorporation of such far-right militia units into the Polish professional army. This was accompanied by the systematic fostering of hysteria over an alleged Russian invasion threat.

Since spring 2014, these paramilitary formations, which maintain close ties to the country's far right, were able to triple their membership to now approximately 80,000, according to a report by the magazine *Vice*. By comparison, the regular Polish Armed Forces include 120,000 soldiers. By comparison, the German Bundeswehr has 177,000 soldiers, with Germany having a population that is twice as large as Poland's.

There are an estimated 120 separate paramilitary units. They will be equipped with guns and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. There are even talks about providing them with tanks and armored vehicles. The first three new national defence (OT) brigades are to be situated in the North-East region of the country, near the border with Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. The goal is to create about 380 OT squadrons nationwide, one for each Polish township with one soldier per one thousand citizens.

As is already the case with the fascist squads in Ukraine, these right-wing paramilitary organisations are being armed and touted by the state not only in preparation for a potential war with Russia, but also to employ them against the working class.

The recruitment for this so-called Voluntary Home Army is scheduled to begin as early as spring 2017. The name of this army is not accidental: it refers to the Home Army (AK), which was subordinate to the bourgeois Polish government-in-exile in London during World War

II. The AK based its struggle against the German occupation on a thoroughly nationalist and anti-Communist perspective; many of its units were also notorious for their anti-Semitism and murder of Jews who tried to escape Nazi persecution.

Through an aggressive nationalistic agitation throughout the media and the use of literature promoting the AK militia fighters to the status of national heroes ("the excommunicated soldiers"), the government is trying to increase the support for these right-wing formations.

The enticement of candidates is conducted through military training that is organised by the government free of charge. Participants are promised careers in the paid army. Efforts to recruit young people are focused on the rural areas in eastern Poland where poverty and unemployment are particularly high. Over the past months, this training has been propagated widely in a campaign that also targets women and children, depicting it as an opportunity of a lifetime, fun, a patriotic duty and a necessity in case of war.

One of these paramilitary groups is the FIA—Fideles et Instructi Armis—Faithful and Prepared in Arms. The organisation is chaired by Bogusław Pacek, a plenipotentiary of the MON and retired general who was responsible for improving military training in Ukraine. Numbering more than 200 members, it began an official collaboration with the 1st Warsaw Armored Brigade of Tadeusz Kościuszko in 2012. Any Polish citizen aged 16 or older can join. Just like members of the World War II-era AK, they will be using pseudonyms instead of their real names.

The FIA is also a founding member of the Federation of Pro-defence Forces. In September 2015, hundreds of members of the Federation of Pro-defence Forces held a rally in commemoration of the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland pledging their readiness to defend the country in case of war.



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