

US fires ICBMs amid war threats against Russia

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The US Air Force launched a Minuteman 3 nuclear missile from an underground bunker on the California coast late Thursday night, the second such test firing of an unarmed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in the space of just one week.

The missile, which hit a test range in the waters of the Kwajalein Atoll, some 2,500 miles southwest of Honolulu, normally carries three independently targeted warheads, each with 20 times the destructive power of the bombs that killed as many as 350,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. For Thursday's flight, it carried a bundle of test instruments.

To ensure that the political significance of the back-to-back launches (there have been just 15 such tests since 2011) was lost on no one, Robert Work, the US deputy secretary of defense, gave an interview on Thursday specifically naming Russia and China and describing the test firings as “a signal ... that we are prepared to use nuclear weapons in defense of our country if necessary.”

This highly unusual and extremely provocative declaration of Washington's readiness to wage a nuclear war came amid rising tensions with China in the South China Sea and Russia in both Syria and Eastern Europe. The nuclear threat has been accompanied by brazen saber-rattling by top Pentagon officials testifying before the US Congress in support of increased US arms spending.

This included testimony Wednesday before the House Armed Services Committee from Admiral Harry Harris, head of the US Navy's Pacific Command, who called for a major escalation of US anti-Chinese naval operations in the South China Sea and charged that Beijing is seeking “hegemony in East Asia,” a strategic imperative that Washington itself is determined to attain by military means.

Even more incendiary were the remarks delivered to the same congressional panel Thursday by Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in

Europe and chief of the US European Command. Breedlove described Russia as “resurgent” and “aggressive,” charging that Moscow had “chosen to be an adversary and poses a long-term existential threat” to the United States.

“The US and NATO must take a 360-degree approach to security—addressing the full spectrum of security challenges from any direction and [ensuring] we are using all elements of our nation's power,” Breedlove said. In stressing “all elements” of US power, the Air Force general was referring to the Pentagon's nuclear arsenal.

Breedlove lashed out at Russia's five-month-old intervention in Syria, which he said had “wildly exacerbated the problem,” presumably by disrupting Washington's attempt to secure regime change through a war in which Al Qaeda serves as America's main proxy force on the ground. He went so far as to accuse Moscow of “weaponizing” the wave of migrants driven to seek refuge in Europe by the US-orchestrated civil war in Syria and its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“To counter Russia, Eucom [the US European Command], working with allies and partners, is deterring Russia now and preparing to fight and win if necessary,” Breedlove declared. There is more than a whiff of madness in Breedlove's remarks. For the top US commander in Europe to talk openly of preparing to “fight and win” against Russia smacks of an invitation to a nuclear holocaust.

Breedlove's remarks were supplemented by those of US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who told the House Appropriations Committee that supposed “nuclear saber-rattling” by Moscow had called into question the Russian leadership's “commitment to strategic stability” and “whether they respect the profound caution that nuclear-age leaders showed with regard to brandishing nuclear weapons.” As recent events have shown, Washington itself shares no such commitment or caution.

With some justification, Russia's Defense Ministry linked this kind of bellicose rhetoric to the debate over the US military budget, remarking that the same "tide rises every year." However, it would be a dangerous error to underestimate the advanced preparations being made by Washington for global war in general and for a military confrontation with Russia in particular.

This year's proposed Pentagon budget includes \$3.4 billion for the European Reassurance Initiative, quadrupling last year's funding. The huge sum is to pay for the continuous rotation of brigade-size units of US combat troops in and out of the former Soviet Baltic republics as well as three eastern European countries, in what amounts to a permanent military siege of Russia's western borders. In addition, it will fund the repositioning of US military hardware, including tanks and heavy artillery, in the same area to allow for the rapid deployment of far larger military units. It will also go toward increased training and more weaponry for the collection of rabidly anti-Russian states in the region.

For the past two years, seizing on the crisis provoked by the Western-backed coup in Ukraine and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea following its approval by a popular referendum, Washington and its allies have carried out an increasingly provocative military buildup whose aim is the intimidation, subjugation, and, ultimately, dismemberment of the Russian Federation. This has included the creation of a "rapid reaction force" that can draw on 40,000 NATO troops. It has also involved an unprecedented series of military exercises within striking distance of Russia's borders.

A pair of think tanks that are intimately connected to the US military and intelligence apparatus have issued back-to-back reports supporting this buildup. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) issued a report earlier this month that was commissioned by US Army Europe. It argued that "a dramatic shift in both the European and transatlantic security paradigm requires a reevaluation of a full range of measures required for the United States to best deter Russia from similar acts of adventurism in and around alliance territory."

On Friday, the Atlantic Council, a virtual arm of NATO, came out with a report, entitled "Alliance at Risk: Strengthening European Defense," which argued for a major military buildup throughout Europe. Directed at shaping the discussion at the NATO summit scheduled to be held in Warsaw in July, it declares, "Strengthening European defense will provide resources to help deter the threat from the East and prevail over the dangers from the

South."

Drafted by top political and military figures, the report reviews the military status of Britain, which it describes as "hollowed out," as well as France, Germany, Norway, Italy and Poland.

The section on Germany decries the "strong anti-militaristic streak" within the population and argues that "political leaders and commentators need to persuade and educate the public on the importance of a stronger defense posture."

Most chilling is the section on Poland, drafted by Tomasz Szatkowski, the undersecretary of state in the Polish Ministry of National Defense, who argues for Warsaw's development of a "nonnuclear deterrence" against Russia that would "consist of new capabilities, such as longer and more powerful warheads on cruise missiles, new types of weaponry (e.g., microwave technology), and offensive cyber capabilities and subversive oriented Special Operations Forces."

Behind the scenes, without anything being said to the people of the United States or the world, US and NATO officials have been discussing changes in the Western nuclear posture and rules of engagement on the pretext that Moscow has violated the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), an allegation that Russia has denied.

To prepare for aggressive nuclear war, the Obama administration has developed a \$1 trillion nuclear weapons modernization program that envisions the deployment of new generations of long-range bombers, nuclear submarines, ICBMs and cruise missiles over the next 30 years. In the fiscal year 2017 Pentagon budget now under discussion, the administration has requested \$9.2 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration, a division of the Department of Energy, for the development of Washington's stockpile of nuclear warheads.



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