Amid anti-Russia media campaign

First permanent deployment of US troops on Russian border since Cold War

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Some 4,000 US troops, together with tanks, artillery and armored vehicles, arrived in Poland over the weekend, further escalating tensions with Russia ahead of the January 20 inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump. It is the largest US troop deployment in Europe since the Cold War.

The troops will be dispersed over seven Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all of which border Russia. After nine months, the troops will be replaced with another unit, making the deployment effectively permanent. NATO plans to deploy a further four battalions to the Russian border later this year, including one each to Poland and the three Baltic states.

The deployment follows a week in which US politics was dominated by denunciations of Russia and President Vladimir Putin. In Senate confirmation hearings for Trump administration cabinet nominees, senators called Putin a "war criminal," an "autocrat" and a murderer, while newspaper reports and TV broadcasts have been filled with charges of Russian plots to subvert the US elections.

The US deployment to Poland is part of the quadrupling of the US defense budget for Eastern Europe in 2017, announced by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter last February. Annual US military spending in the region will rise from $800 million last year to $3.4 billion this year.

In addition to deploying ground forces, the US plans to construct a missile defense system in Poland and further stockpile munitions and armaments along the Russian border.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the buildup "a threat to our security… especially as it concerns a third party building up its military presence near our borders." He added, "Any country may and will take a buildup of foreign military presence along its borders negatively. This is exactly how we take it."

The deployment was originally scheduled to take place at the end of this month, after the inauguration, but it was expedited by an Obama administration anxious to prevent any retreat from the aggressive anti-Russia line demanded by dominant sections of the US military and intelligence establishment.

The deployment was welcomed by the virulently right-wing and anti-Russian Polish government, which received a formal warning last year from the European Union for violations of "the rule of law, democracy and human rights." Since coming to power in October 2015, the Law and Justice (PiS) Party has sought to pack the country's courts with right-wing ideologues and has cracked down on oppositional media.

Polish officials hailed the US troops on Saturday with a ceremony in the western Polish town of Zagan. The officials made a series of hysterical remarks, seeking to present Russia as an aggressive menace to the sovereignty of Poland and other Eastern European countries.

"We have waited for you for a very long time," Polish Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz told the assembled troops. "We waited for decades… feeling that we were the only one who protected civilization from aggression that came from the east."

He said the presence of the US military would ensure "freedom, independence and peace in Europe and the whole world." Prime Minister Beata Szydlo added, "This is an important day for Poland, for Europe, for our common defense."

Speaking at the ceremony on Saturday, Paul Jones, the US ambassador to Poland, said the latest deployment signaled an "ironclad commitment" to Washington's NATO allies. "This is America's most capable fighting force: a combat-ready, highly trained US armored brigade, with our most advanced equipment and weaponry."

One of the battalions supplied by the United States will be stationed in eastern Poland in the so-called Suwalki Gap between Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. These troops are intended to serve as a "tripwire" force, raising the chance of a full-scale military conflict between Russia and the US in the event of a border conflict.

The nominal reason for the stepped-up deployment is the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, portrayed by the US and NATO as an act of unilateral aggression by Russia.

In reality, Russia's move on Crimea was primarily of a defensive character, a response to the February 2014 US-backed and fascist-led coup in Ukraine that threatened to cut off Russia's access to its naval base in Sevastopol. The annexation followed an overwhelming referendum vote in mainly Russian-speaking Crimea to secede from Ukraine and join Russia.

The US and its NATO allies used the annexation as the pretext for a series of retaliatory measures, including economic sanctions directed against the Russian government and individuals.

The deployment of US troops has been largely downplayed in the US media, evoking a single mention, as an aside, on ABC's "This Week" interview progam on Sunday. It was almost entirely ignored on "Meet the Press" and "Face the Nation." To the extent that US news outlets, like CNN and the *New York Times*, reported the deployment, it was to present the move as a defense of small states on Russia's border.

Completely absent from this reporting was any historical context. The Second World War, which led to the deaths of 26 million Soviet citizens, began with the 1939 invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany, which saw the conquest of Poland as the prelude to an invasion of the USSR. Nazi Germany's "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union began in June of 1941. Hilter considered the conquest of Soviet Russia to be the key to making Germany a world power capable of competing with the United States.

Now, as the United States seeks to cement its stranglehold over Eurasia in preparation for a showdown with its main international rival, China, it prepares for a military clash with Russia, the world's second-ranked nuclear power.

While for now Trump has signaled a more accommodative stance toward Russia, this is only for the purpose of focusing US diplomatic, economic and military aggression against China. In an interview published this weekend by the *Wall Street Journal*, Trump simultaneously said he was open to lifting economic sanctions against Russia and reiterated his willingness to reconsider Washington's longstanding policy of not recognizing Taiwan. The Chinese have warned that such a policy move would lead to a rupture of diplomatic relations.

Trump's nominee for secretary of state, former Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, used his Senate confirmation hearing last week to declare that the US under Trump would block Chinese access to its island posessions in the South China Sea. Chinese sources in response called any such action an act of war.

In the increasingly bitter faction fight within the US political establishment over foreign policy, both sides favor military escalation against nuclear-armed powers, whether against Russia or China, with catastrophic consequences for the entire world.

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