

US escalates Russia tensions on eve of Trump inauguration

Bill Van Auken
18 January 2017

Over 300 US combat Marines arrived in Norway Monday as part of an increasingly provocative US-NATO buildup on Russia's borders in the immediate run-up to Friday's inauguration of Donald Trump as president.

The deployment, carried out under the pretext of training US Marines for combat in Arctic conditions, represents a radical break with nearly 70 years of Norway forswearing the deployment of foreign troops on its soil in order to maintain peaceful relations with first the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation.

As in Eastern Europe, Washington is maintaining the pretense that the deployment does not violate NATO's pledge to Moscow in the run-up to the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the USSR that it would not permanently deploy "significant" combat forces near Russia's borders. It accomplishes this by establishing a system of rotation in which the 330 Marines deployed Monday will be replaced by a different unit of the same size within six months.

The Marines will be joined in March by British troops for what has been dubbed "Joint Viking" exercises with the Norwegian military. The clear aim is to escalate military pressure from NATO's northernmost border with Russia.

The deployment in Norway, which Marine Maj. Gen. Niel Nelson described as a demonstration by Washington to its allies of "our willingness to support and defend them and NATO," is part of a far larger buildup against Russia, which over the weekend saw the deployment of some 4,000 troops, backed by tanks, artillery and armored cars, in Poland. These forces are to be stationed across seven Eastern European countries, including the former Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all of which share borders with Russia.

This larger deployment, which was set to take effect at the end of January, was speeded up with the apparent aim of having the troops in place before Friday's inauguration as part of a bid to cut across Trump's avowed intentions to make "some good deals with Russia."

The stationing of US Marines on Norwegian territory has been prepared by a drastic realignment of Norwegian foreign and military policy under the right-wing government of Prime Minister Erna Solberg.

Before joining NATO in 1949, Norway entered a so-called base agreement with Moscow pledging that it would not bring foreign troops to its military bases unless it faced an imminent threat or was attacked. Until now, the country has allowed the US and NATO to stockpile arms and ammunition in tunnels dug under the Norwegian mountains. In advance of the Marine deployment, these stockpiles have reportedly been beefed up with the latest weaponry.

In addition to allowing in the US Marines, the Norwegian government is deploying hundreds of additional troops to the Finnmark region bordering Russia in the country's far north. "We do not consider Russia a direct threat to Norway today," Norwegian Defense Ministry spokesman Audum Halvorsen told the British daily *The Independent*. "But we pay close attention to Russian military activity in the High North."

In addition, the Norwegian government has reversed its earlier abstention from the bid by the US and NATO to establish a ballistic missile defense system surrounding Russia. Solberg's government has indicated that it will now participate, including with the deployment of advanced radar systems near the Russian border and on Norwegian frigates close to the home base of Russia's strategic submarines in the Murmansk

region.

Moscow considers the anti-missile system part of a US attempt to create conditions in which it could limit any Russian response to a US nuclear strike.

With little more than two days until Trump takes office, the Obama administration continues to supplement the military provocations on Russia's borders with a barrage of propaganda painting Moscow as a threat and an aggressor.

Samantha Power, the US ambassador to the United Nations and the standard-bearer for the Obama administration's hypocritical policy of "human rights" imperialism, delivered what she described as her last speech in office to the Atlantic Council, a US-based think tank and unofficial arm of NATO, in which she described Russia as a "major threat" and "core threat" to the United States.

While heaping on the usual denunciations of Russia for "aggression" in Ukraine, "war crimes" in Syria, "hacking" and having "interfered in our presidential election," Power insisted that Moscow's alleged crimes went beyond "any particular actions" and were the product of a "broader strategy" of "weakening the rules-based order" imposed by Washington in the aftermath of World War II.

For his part, Joe Biden made his last foreign trip as US vice president to Ukraine in order to further escalate the war threats against Russia. Speaking in Kiev Tuesday, Biden affirmed that "the international community must continue to stand as one against Russian aggression and coercion."

He praised the Obama administration for having "trained your national guard, conventional military forces, as well as special forces; helped you increase your readiness and make your force interoperable with NATO."

Placing the entire blame for the conflict in eastern Ukraine on Moscow, he insisted that sanctions against Russia must remain in place. Toward the conclusion of his remarks, he warned, "This next year is going to be a very, very telling year—a very telling year."

And finally, Obama spokesman Josh Earnest told a White House press conference that it appeared that Vladimir Putin was using the "talking points" of the "incoming administration." The remark came in response to a speech in which Putin charged the incumbent administration with attempting to

"delegitimize" the Trump presidency with false allegations.

Earnest went on to describe Trump as "deeply misguided" in criticizing the US intelligence agencies and, in particular, CIA Director John Brennan, who on Monday criticized Trump for lacking a "full appreciation of Russian capabilities, Russia's intentions."

"Particularly to call into question the integrity of somebody like John Brennan, somebody who has served at the CIA for three decades, somebody who has served the country in dangerous locations around the world to try to keep us safe. I'm offended by it," Earnest said.

The bitter internecine struggles within the ruling establishment in the run-up to Trump's inauguration express deep divisions over strategic aims. While the US intelligence agencies and the Obama administration are demanding a continuation and intensification of the military buildup against Russia, employing neo-McCarthyite rhetoric to counter any opposition, the incoming Trump administration has indicated its intention to shift toward a more direct confrontation with China. Both policies threaten humanity with the prospect of nuclear war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact