

The guns of August

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In the closing weeks of the summer, tens of thousands of NATO and Russian soldiers are participating in dueling war games across Europe. Just over a century after the guns of August 1914 announced the outbreak of World War I in Europe, conditions are being created in multiple military flash-points for the eruption of conflict between the world's major nuclear powers.

The US aircraft carrier George H. W. Bush is joining a British carrier strike group for the “Saxon Warrior” exercise in the North Sea. This follows last month’s “Saber Guardian” exercise involving 25,000 NATO soldiers in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

NATO troops are joining more exercises across Eastern Europe. Thousands more are deploying to Poland and the Baltic states, on Russia’s borders, and 2,000 US troops have joined the “Noble Partner” exercise in Georgia, a former Soviet republic. This is the largest US exercise in Georgia since 2008, when a US-backed attack by the Georgian army killed Russian peace keepers stationed in the north of the country, triggering a brief war between Russia and Georgia.

Meanwhile, Washington is debating whether to arm the far-right ultra-nationalist Ukrainian regime that emerged from the February 2014 NATO-backed coup in Kiev. The US first proposed this policy in 2015, but abandoned it after Germany and France, warning that escalation could trigger all-out war with Russia, negotiated a peace deal in Minsk.

Moscow is staging its own war games. After holding joint naval exercises in the Baltic Sea with Chinese guided-missile destroyers, it is hosting its International Army Games involving forces from countries such as China, Iran, Egypt, Angola, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. It is also preparing for next month’s Zapad drill in western Russia, which NATO sources claim could involve as many as 100,000 troops.

The unprecedented scope of these war exercises, the largest since the end of the Cold War, is a political

warning. The military focus of the NATO alliance is shifting from the Middle East back to Europe. The *New York Times* reports that US and NATO units are making “wide-ranging” changes to equipment and strategy to prepare for war with high-tech enemies. This includes repainting their tanks from desert tan to dark green so as to blend into European terrain.

Behind the backs of the masses, political and military cabals are getting ready for conflicts comparable to, or bloodier than, the world wars of the last century. US General John Healy declared, “What we’re eventually going toward is a globally integrated exercise program so that we [are] ... all working off the same sheet of music in one combined global exercise.” But for what is this “global exercise”—with drills on the Korean peninsula, in the South China Sea and in the Middle East—preparing? This “global exercise” is a dry run for global war.

A deafening silence prevails in official circles as to what world war would mean. It is, however, a fact that a war in which nuclear bombs exploded over cities across North America, Europe and Russia would claim billions of lives. And so, as opposition to war and military spending grows among masses of workers in America and Europe, the political and media establishment churns out endless, unsubstantiated accusations of Russian aggression in Ukraine and Russian hijacking of the US elections in an attempt to overwhelm and intimidate the public and whip up a war fever.

Military officials confess that these war games pose the danger of escalation, whether intentional or accidental, into war. However, the NATO countries’ media turn even this into grist for the mill of anti-Russia hysteria. In an article attacking Russia’s Zapad exercise, MSN.com writes, “Many officials are on edge that an error by an alliance or Russian soldier, such as misreading a drill as an aggressive act, could quickly

escalate into a crisis if one side were to respond with force ... NATO forces will avoid holding exercises close to the Russian border during the Russian drill.”

Claims that Moscow is responsible for the war danger are saturated with imperialist hypocrisy. Russia is carrying out exercises on its own soil, while the United States and the European imperialist powers are marching their troops right up to Russia’s borders.

The danger of escalation and war is rooted in policies pursued by the NATO powers, above all the United States, over the more than quarter-century since the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. By means of US-led wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Syria and beyond, Washington sought to establish its hegemony over the Eurasian landmass. It aimed not only to prevent the emergence of a rival power dominating Eurasia, but also to control the energy supplies and trade routes of its “allies” in Europe and Asia.

The current escalation against Russia is the product of a series of devastating setbacks for the US in these wars. Washington’s Islamist proxy forces face imminent defeat in the civil war that it and NATO incited against the Russian-backed regime in Syria, and the NATO-backed regime in Kiev has failed to seize the entire country, losing effective control of Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine and the key Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea. And amid growing economic rivalries between America and Europe, these setbacks have encouraged the European powers, led by Germany, to pursue an independent, that is, potentially hostile, foreign and military policy.

Conflicts are surging as Washington seeks both to strengthen its position against Russia and split Europe by winning over allies, notably in Eastern Europe, on an anti-Russian basis. These Euro-American conflicts are rooted not in the boorish persona of Trump, but in the objective conflict between American and European imperialism. Last month, it was not Trump but the US Congress that passed sanctions cutting off critical Russian oil and gas exports to Europe and threatening Western European corporations active in the Russian energy trade with financial penalties, prompting angry protests from Germany and other US “allies.”

The Kremlin’s policy, rooted in the bankrupt Russian nationalism of the post-Soviet capitalist oligarchy, offers no way forward in opposing the imperialist war

drive. Afraid and incapable of appealing to anti-war sentiment in the international working class, the Kremlin instead incites right-wing forces and ethnic tensions within Russia. It oscillates between risking all-out military confrontation with the imperialist powers and capitulating to them in an attempt to reach a deal, as in its recent vote for UN sanctions against North Korea.

Like their political ancestors a century ago, the rival capitalist governments are setting into motion a dynamic that leads to world war, this time, however, involving the use of nuclear weapons that could destroy the planet. There is no way to stop the drive to war outside of a politically conscious intervention by the working class. The main danger is that masses of people are not truly aware of the risks posed by this explosive situation.

It is under these conditions that Google is censoring left-wing, socialist and anti-war web sites, the *World Socialist Web Site* first among them, removing WSWS articles from results for searches on war. And this is why the WSWS stresses the urgency of building an international anti-war movement based on the working class and an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist perspective, and asks for its readers’ active support in spreading its material opposing censorship and war.



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