US relaunches Second Fleet in war preparations against Russia

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The US Navy announced on Friday that it is relaunching its Second Fleet, a naval force to be deployed in the North Atlantic and directed at preparing for military confrontation with Russia.

The fleet had been mothballed in 2011 under the Obama administration based upon the assessment that the likelihood of war with Russia had declined. Funding for the fleet, it was argued, could be better spent on buying new warships to be deployed in the US "pivot to Asia," directed at reasserting American hegemony in the region and confronting China's ascendence by means of military force.

In announcing the relaunching of the fleet—which follows Congressional approval of a massive increase in military spending—Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson stated, "Our National Defense Strategy makes clear that we're back in an era of great power competition as the security environment continues to grow more challenging and complex."

He added that "the Atlantic Ocean is as dynamic a theater as any and in particular the North Atlantic, so as we consider high-end naval warfare, fighting in the Atlantic, that will be the Second Fleet's responsibility."

Pentagon spokesman Johnny Michael was more explicit in terms of the target of this "high-end naval warfare," stating, "NATO is refocusing on the Atlantic in recognition of the great power competition prompted by a resurgent Russia."

The National Defense Strategy document cited by Admiral Richardson stated in part: "Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security."

The 2018 National Defense Strategy specifically targets China and Russia, declaring that "It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model — gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions."

The Second Fleet was initially created in 1950 at the outset of the Cold War between the US and the former Soviet Union. Its most famous operation was carried out in October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war. Its warships, including a US aircraft carrier, were deployed northeast of the island to enforce a quarantine against Cuba, intercepting and searching ships, raising the prospect that a confrontation at sea could lead to a nuclear exchange.

The relaunching of the fleet, which is to be based at the US Naval station in Norfolk, Virginia, is bound up with an even more reckless US imperialist policy today.

Testifying before Congress last month, US Defense Secretary James Mattis said that the Pentagon intends to scrap a previous practice of rotational deployments of US war fleets, moving instead to an unpredictable strategy based on "preparation for great power competition" and the development of a naval force "ready to surge and deal with the high-end warfare."

The US military website *DefenseNews* reported that this policy may be put into effect this month with the diversion of the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group from a planned deployment to the Middle East, keeping it instead in "the European theater as a check on Russia." The armada includes warships with the

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capacity of launching 1,000 cruise missiles.

The US has also escalated its naval interventions in the Black Sea, sending destroyers armed with cruise missiles into waters off of Russia and flying spy planes in operations described as provocations by Moscow.

A major NATO exercise involving troops and military hardware from eight countries began last week in the Black Sea on what the US-led military alliance described as its “southern and eastern flank.” The war games, dubbed NATO Sea Shield 2018, involve 21 naval ships, 10 planes and a submarine, as well as 2,300 troops from Romania, the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Ukraine, Greece and Spain.

This naval buildup, designed to prepare for an all-out war in which securing supply lines between North America and Western Europe would be a priority, is justified with propaganda indicting Moscow’s aggression, Russian military expansion and the “annexation” of Crimea. All of this turns reality on its head.

Having waged a quarter of a century of uninterrupted wars of aggression in the Middle East, the US and its NATO allies are seeking to militarily encircle Russia, which is viewed as a principal impediment to US imperialism’s assertion of its hegemony over the Eurasian landmass. In 2014, the US, together with Berlin, backed a right-wing coup in Ukraine in a bid to tighten the military noose around Russia. This has seen NATO’s creation of a 40,000-strong “Rapid Reaction Force” and the deployment of four “battlegroups” comprised of 1,000 troops each in the three former Soviet Baltic republics and Poland to serve as tripwires for a war between the world’s two nuclear superpowers.

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