

After ripping up of INF treaty

Pentagon escalating buildup on Russia's borders

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The Pentagon's top military commander in Europe told the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday that more US troops and more warships must be deployed to the continent to counter what he described as Moscow's "malign influence" and Russian threats to "the United States' vital national interests."

The testimony by Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, the head of EUROCOM and NATO's supreme allied commander, came just one day after Russia formally withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), following the Trump administration's unilateral abrogation of the landmark nuclear accord last month.

The scrapping of the treaty heralds a resurgence of a nuclear arms race on a scale not seen since the height of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, threatening humanity with a global conflagration.

Scaparrotti laid out the Pentagon's agenda of an escalation of the confrontation with Russia, presenting the country as a dangerous aggressor that must be stopped militarily.

"Russia is a long-term, strategic competitor that wants to advance its own objectives at the expense of US prosperity and security and that sees the United States and the NATO Alliance as the principal threat to its geopolitical ambitions," he told the Senate panel. "In pursuit of its objectives, Moscow seeks to assert its influence over nations along its periphery, undermine NATO solidarity, and fracture the rules-based international order."

The general's narrative turned reality on its head. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States and NATO, in violation of an agreement reached between Washington and the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, have pushed steadily to the east,

absorbing the former Warsaw Pact countries into NATO and deploying hostile military forces on the very borders of Russia.

Scaparrotti went on to indicate Washington's real concerns and aims, stating: "While the United States maintains global military superiority over Russia, evolving Russian capabilities threaten to erode our competitive military advantage, challenge our ability to operate uncontested in all domains, and diminish our ability to deter Russian aggression."

US imperialism is determined to confront any power that challenges a "rule-based international order" in which the rules are dictated by Washington, and to assure that both its military as well as its financial and corporate oligarchy are able to "operate uncontested in all domains." This requires the transformation of Russia into an outright semi-colony.

The government of President Vladimir Putin, representing the interests of the Russian oligarchy, has pursued a bankrupt policy that zig-zags between futile appeals for reason on the part of Washington and an adventurist turn to militarism.

Scaparrotti detailed before the Senate committee the results of what he described as Russia's "high levels of defense spending"—which amount to less than one-tenth of the US military budget. He cited in particular Moscow's "nuclear modernization program," which he said includes "advanced modern road-mobile and silo-based Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), new Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), and Long Range Strategic Bombers," as well as the development of "nuclear-armed hypersonic weapons, which could provide them the capability to attack anywhere in the globe with little or no notice."

The general's testimony, coming just one day after Moscow formally withdrew from the INF treaty, left no doubt that the Pentagon is actively preparing for nuclear war with both Russia and China.

While Washington has repeatedly charged Moscow with violating the treaty through its deployment of SSC-8 cruise missiles, Russia has insisted that the weapon does not breach the terms of the agreement, which bars weapons with ranges of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Moscow has in turn charged that the US deployment in Romania and Poland of missile defense systems that have offensive capabilities, as well as the introduction of armed drones in the region, represent violations of the accord.

Central to the US decisions to rip up the INF treaty is the fact that China, which is not a signatory to the agreement, has produced medium-range missiles to counter the US military's "pivot to Asia" and attempt to encircle the country militarily. Washington wants to deploy similar weapons in the region.

Pressed as to the Pentagon's strategy in the wake of the abrogation of the treaty, Scaparrotti replied, "I don't know that we have a plan today. We're still in a six-month period [until the treaty formally expires] here where we are looking at what our options are."

This is hardly credible. Having deliberately scuttled the treaty, Washington clearly has plans as to how it will seek military advantage in its aftermath, including through the deployment of nuclear-armed missiles in both Europe and Asia, triggering a new arms race and placing the world on a hair-trigger for nuclear war. The supreme allied commander, who exercises more power than any US legislator or diplomat, did not care to publicly share these plans.

The Pentagon's European commander also called for an increase in the supply of lethal weapons to the right-wing nationalist regime in Ukraine. Since the far-right coup in Kiev—orchestrated and financed by the European Union and US imperialism—plunged the region into crisis, Washington has provided the Ukrainian military with more than \$1 billion in aid, though most of it has been classified as non-lethal.

In April of last year, however, the US provided the Ukrainian military with Javelin anti-armor missiles, which Scaparrotti claimed had served as a "deterrent."

The general stated that in the wake of last November's provocation in the Azov Sea, which led to

the seizure of three Ukrainian ships that sailed into waters claimed by Russia near Crimea, the US needed "to help them get this Navy back up and begin to supply it."

The Pentagon has deployed the destroyer U.S.S. Donald Cook in the Black Sea, just south of the Kerch Strait, leading into the Azov Sea, and, according to Bloomberg News, has pressed for Germany and France to send warships through the narrow strait in a bid to provoke Russia.

"They, frankly, don't like us in the Black Sea," Scaparrotti told the Senate committee. "It's international waters—and we should sail and fly there."

Scaparrotti delivered his testimony in advance of the release of the Pentagon's 2020 budget request, which is expected next week. His main aim was to press the US Congress for more funding for the US escalation against Russia. Specifically, he called for the addition of two more guided-missile destroyers to the US fleet based in the region, as well as the deployment of additional US troops close to Russia's borders, including armored units.



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