

# Russia conducts nationwide military exercises as Ukraine, NATO prepare for war

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Against the backdrop of intensifying tensions with Ukraine, the Russian government will proceed with previously planned nationwide military exercises, announced Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday. The test of the country's fighting capacity and readiness will stretch over the course of April, involve both ground and naval forces, and include more than 4,000 separate events conducted across the country, even in its most remote regions.

While the military exercises have been scheduled for some time, Moscow's public reaffirmation that they will proceed is clearly intended as a show of force in the face of growing threats of war against Russia over Ukraine. In the last several weeks, these threats have reached a fever pitch, with the danger emerging of a full-blown conflict between Russia and Ukraine, behind which stand the United States and Germany.

Over the last seven days, the Ukrainian government has called on NATO to admit the country to the transnational military alliance, appealed for stepped-up NATO intervention in the Black Sea, and announced that Ukrainian forces will be conducting joint exercises with NATO later this year.

Prior to this, Kiev outlined its intentions to retake by force Crimea, the peninsula extending into the Black Sea that rejoined Russia in 2014. Fighting has also intensified between Ukrainian and Russian-allied forces in the Donbass, where breakaway republics emerged in 2014 after a coup orchestrated by Washington and Berlin brought to power a far-right anti-Russian government in Ukraine.

In calls with the heads of state of Canada and Britain on Tuesday, President Volodymyr Zelensky secured assurances of these nations' support for Ukraine. They follow the lead of the US government, the architect of the pro-Kiev, anti-Russian campaign, which has

involved the financing, equipping, and training of Ukraine's military for years. Writing for the Atlantic Council, American political analyst Stephen Blank appealed Tuesday for the US to go further and upgrade Ukraine's air force in order to make clear the "hard and tangible long-term strategic costs Russia must bear for its malign conduct."

These events unfold as NATO is pressing forward with war preparations against Russia. It is currently conducting a massive military training exercise that extends across the European continent. DEFENDER-Europe 2021, involving 27 nations and 30,000 troops and unfolding in 12 countries, "demonstrates," according to the US Army's Europe and Africa division, "our ability to serve as a strategic security partner in the western Balkans and Black Sea regions while sustaining our abilities in northern Europe, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Africa."

Involving ground, maritime, and airborne exercises along the entire stretch of Russia's western borders and in areas central to Moscow's geopolitical interests, DEFENDER-Europe 21 is gearing up NATO to wage World War III. The consequences of such a conflict would be, at the very least, the loss of tens of millions of lives in Europe and Russia and, most likely, the nuclear annihilation of the planet, as the US military has repeatedly made clear that it is prepared to use atomic weapons to secure American interests.

Not a single person in Ukraine, or anywhere else for that matter, will achieve "liberation" from "Russian aggression" under these circumstances. Rather, they will all be dead.

Nonetheless, the Ukrainian government of President Zelensky is careening forwards. Its top negotiator in previous peace accords brokered over the conflict in Ukraine's Donbass, Leonid Kravchuk, first president of

an independent Ukraine, just declared that he would no longer hold discussions with the leading representative of one of the breakaway republics. He also declared that he would not attend talks if they were held in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, which is allied with Russia.

Ukraine's parliament is passing measures that will allow it to more rapidly call up conscripts. Zelensky is creating two new federal agencies charged with combatting "disinformation," with the clear intention of scrubbing out any of the widely held anti-war sentiments felt in the population.

The war drive is, in part, a desperate effort to divert attention away from the disastrous situation in the country with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of economic policies the Kiev government is implementing at the behest of the Western powers.

Ukraine's population is being hammered by the combined effects of the coronavirus and International Monetary Fund austerity policies. On Wednesday, the country reported an additional 15,415 COVID-19 cases, up from 13,276 the previous day. Deaths from the virus also just reached new records. Hospitals are hitting capacity. Only 0.005 percent of the population has been vaccinated, less than the impoverished countries of Rwanda or Mongolia.

Utility rates for a whole number of services were increased at the start of the year, prompting widespread protests, including street demonstrations and road blockages. "Fuel poverty," in particular, is a pressing problem, as households can no longer afford to heat their homes or cook food. Due to increasing costs, 11 million—70 percent—of Ukraine's pensioners have an income below the official cost of living.

Like Ukraine, Russia too is in the grip of domestic crises. In addition to the physical toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has officially infected 4.4 million people and killed nearly 100,000, the virus is hammering the working class economically. There are widespread job losses and wage cuts. Prices for basic foodstuffs are rising, as is household debt.

Disillusionment with the Putin government is growing and, in the lead up to Duma elections in September of this year, the Kremlin seeks to use the conflict with Ukraine to shore up its position by appealing to nationalist sentiment and the well-founded fears of the population that the West is hell-bent on

their destruction.

The working class of Russia and Ukraine will not find their way out of this situation either by turning to the war-crazed powers in Washington, Berlin, and elsewhere, or to the Kremlin. The American ruling class, perched on top of a rotting corpse of an economy, has laid waste to society after society since the year 2001 alone, in its desperate effort to secure global hegemony and arrest its economic decline.

The Russian ruling class, having destroyed all of the accomplishments that the Soviet working class won at great cost over decades, has little more than massive oil reserves and a huge nuclear apparatus to fall back on in its attempts to maintain a grip on the people and resources of Eurasia. It cares nothing for the lives of Russia's working class and cannot defend them. The future of Ukraine and Russia's masses lies in a united struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and their bloody wars—and for international socialism.



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