

US and NATO press ahead with anti-Russian military buildup

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Against the backdrop of Friday's meeting in Geneva between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the US and NATO have been continuing to rapidly build up their military forces along and near Russia's borders. While Blinken described yesterday's conversation as "frank and substantive" and Lavrov said there was an agreement "to have a reasonable dialogue," the White House and the trans-Atlantic alliance continue to take one provocative step after another.

This week, British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace declared that London is increasing its support for the Ukrainian military by funneling more defensive weapons to Kiev. In addition to providing the government with 2,000 highly advanced anti-tank missiles, it is dispatching 30 elite troops as trainers. According to Sky News, witnesses have noticed a dramatic uptick in surveillance flights over the region by British aircraft since Monday of this week.

Britain is also currently in the process of making a \$1.6 billion loan to Ukraine to update its navy and help it build a port in Berdyansk, which sits on the Sea of Azov, a body of water that Moscow considers its domain and whose entry-exit waterway—the Straits of Kerch—is controlled by Russia.

The United States has now authorized the Baltic countries to send Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine and approved another \$200 million in military aid for the country, on top of last year's \$450 million. Given that any possible invasion by Russia would take the form of ground forces, the provision of air defenses to Kiev would seem to have little purpose beyond staging some sort of provocation that would draw a Russian incursion or be put to future use in transforming Ukraine, as retired four-star Navy admiral James Stavridis and Senator Mitt Romney recently

proposed, into the next Afghanistan.

Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, New Jersey Democrat Bob Menendez, is pushing the passage of the "Defending Ukraine Sovereignty Act of 2022," which would "impose crippling sanctions on the Russian banking sector and senior military and government officials," "prohibit transactions on Russia's primary and secondary sovereign debt," "authorize sanctions on Russia's extractive industries as well as on providers of specialized financial messaging services (e.g., SWIFT)," "call upon the Departments of Defense and State to expedite transfer of defense articles to bolster Ukraine's defense capabilities," and "authorize \$500 million in supplemental emergency security assistance to Ukraine."

In an interview on MSNBC on Friday, Menendez, in comments directed at Putin himself, said that if Russia invades Ukraine, "not only will you and the Russian economy face devastating sanctions but you are going to face a much more fortified Ukraine such that if you send Russia's sons into battle expect the casualties of war will send many back to Russia in body bags." To make such a promise to the Russian people is extraordinary. Nazi Germany put 27 million of them in body bags.

Meanwhile, Spain, Denmark, and Canada have all declared their solidarity with Kiev. Following a meeting with Blinken on Tuesday, the government in Madrid dispatched warships, including a minesweeper and a frigate, to the Black Sea and fighter jets to Bulgaria. There they will be joined by Dutch aircraft, with Amsterdam announcing it is sending F-35s to the Black Sea nation.

Canada, which since 2020 has had special forces on the ground in Ukraine training their counterparts, has

now sent additional troops, stated it is considering sending military materiel, and promised a \$120 million economic aid package. Denmark has sent a frigate into the Baltic, and France is dispatching forces to Romania.

In Ukraine itself, the war hysteria flows unimpeded. The press secretary to Ukraine's president claimed Friday that Russia may intend to march its troops all the way to Kharkiv, a major city in the country's north and about 340 kilometers west of the breakaway pro-Russian republics in the east. Doing so would entail occupying a large portion of the country. The purpose of this accusation, for which no evidence was presented, is to whip Ukraine's nationalists into a frenzy and its population, at least as much as it can, into a state of terror. Much of Ukraine is ethnically Russian, speaks Russian as its first language, and/or identifies with the Russian culture and people. These kinds of remarks can lay the groundwork for an ethnic bloodbath inside Ukraine, whose military is under the control of open fascists.

Last week, the US made clear that it is prepared, at any minute, to turn Ukraine into a war zone. Claiming that it had evidence that the Kremlin was preparing to launch a "false flag" operation in Ukraine to justify a Russian invasion, the White House—the grandmaster of "false flags"—can now argue that any attack on, for instance, Russian citizens in Ukraine, is the work of Russia itself and that the US and NATO must respond.

The Russian government is answering the escalating threat by deploying 140 additional warships to the Black Sea, along with 10,000 troops, and another 1,000 pieces of military equipment. It is also sending amphibious watercraft to the Baltic. Over the course of this month and next, Russia's navy is conducting exercises across "all zones," including all oceans that touch Russia and those seas of major global significance, such as the Mediterranean, the Northern seas, the Sea of Okhotsk, the Northeastern Atlantic, and the Pacific. Battalion tactical groups in Russia's Southern Military District are actively training.

Russia's Duma, the country's parliament, is in the process of issuing a formal appeal to President Putin to recognize Donbass and Luhansk—the breakaway regions in Ukraine's east—as independent republics. It also wants the Kremlin leader to announce that Russia will take measures to defend Russian citizens in this region.

Coming out of the Friday discussion between the two representatives, Blinken stated that the US would provide a written response next week to Russia's demands, which include a guarantee that Ukraine not be admitted to NATO, NATO troops and equipment be pulled back, and massive, anti-Russian NATO military exercises be halted.

As the US has so far indicated that it will agree to none of this, whatever letter is delivered to Moscow next week may well reject all of the Kremlin's demands and instead contain a list of ultimatums to which Russia cannot agree. Washington and Brussels have repeatedly insisted that Moscow move its military forces away from the Ukrainian border and not invade Ukraine. But inasmuch as the Kremlin has continually said it has no intention of invading Ukraine, it is impossible to appease the US and NATO on this point. And were Moscow to concede that Washington and Brussels have the right to dictate where Russia locates troops inside its own country, the Kremlin would effectively be abdicating sovereignty over its own territory.

Beleaguered by a never-ending pandemic that is killing millions worldwide to which the Western governments are responding by lifting practically all public health measures, the reckless and mad dash to war with Russia over Ukraine has no base of popular support in the United States.

A just-released poll by the Convention of States Action in partnership with the Trafalgar Group found that in the US "just 15.3 percent of likely general election voters believed the U.S. should provide troops as 'boots on the ground' in the event of an invasion" of Ukraine by Russia, according to *Newsweek*. One third said that only diplomacy should be used to intervene.



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