NATO, Ukraine, Russia stage military exercises amid US-promoted war hysteria

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More military forces will be engaged in simulated combat across Eastern Europe Thursday than at any time in recent history, as NATO, Ukraine and Russia all begin military exercises involving tens of thousands of soldiers.

The Russian exercise in neighboring Belarus is long-planned, and is scheduled to end on February 20, a date reaffirmed by Russian officials after French President Emmanuel Macron portrayed it as a concession won by his diplomatic foray to Moscow. Government spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed Macron's claims, saying there had never been any plans to extend the exercises or deploy Russian troops permanently on the Belarus-Ukraine border.

Peskov said the maneuvers in Belarus were doubly necessary because of "unprecedented security threats" against the two countries. He cited "blackmail and pressure" by the western powers who were arming Ukraine.

Earlier in the week, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that entry of Ukraine into NATO would inevitably mean war between NATO and Russia, because of Ukraine's announced plans to carry out the reconquest of Crimea.

The NATO and Ukrainian exercises have been organized suddenly, in a provocative manner, as part of the ongoing campaign of war hysteria, spearheaded by the Biden administration, Boris Johnson in Britain and the corporate media in both countries.

Several thousand US paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division are deploying into southeast Poland, near the border with Belarus and Ukraine, and will simulate combat parachute drops in the coming days, the Pentagon announced, without giving an exact date. Hundreds more US soldiers began arriving Wednesday in Romania, redeployed from a base in Germany.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday, in a "exclusive" story, i.e., an authorized leak from the Pentagon, that the US forces in Poland were there to receive a possible surge of Americans fleeing the Ukraine in the wake of a Russian invasion. It noted that the officer in charge of the operation, Major General C. D. Donahue, had previously commanded US forces at the Kabul airport during the mass evacuation last August.

The portrayal of the 82nd Airborne as a group of Mother Teresas setting up tents and stockpiling food, water and bedding for refugees hardly squares with the historical role of that division as the spearhead of countless US military attacks. The paratroopers are far more likely to act as an offensive force, although the *Journal* article hastened to reassure its readers: "The troops aren't authorized to enter Ukraine and won't evacuate Americans or fly aircraft missions from inside Ukraine, officials said."

In Estonia, British and Estonian forces began a simulated tank battle within sight of the Russian border, only a short drive from Russia's second-largest city, St. Petersburg. Under the name Leningrad, that city endured a nearly three-year siege by Nazi armies during World War II, in which more than a million Soviet citizens died.

More British troop movements to Eastern Europe were announced Wednesday, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrived in Poland to show the flag and meet with officials of the ultra-right government. Johnson was no doubt happy to flee London, where he is under siege over the so-called "partygate" scandal, involving drinking parties at his offices which flagrantly violated COVID-19 pandemic rules.

In Ukraine, where President Volodymyr Zelensky has sought to downplay the US claims that a Russian

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invasion of his country is “imminent,” the defense ministry is starting extensive military exercises Thursday to coincide with the exercises across the border in Belarus, involving Russian and Belarus troops.

Ukraine’s defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said soldiers would train with new antitank weapons just provided by Britain and the United States, and with Turkish armed drones. He did not reveal how many troops were involved, but thanks to extensive aid and equipping by the NATO powers, Ukraine now has the second-largest army in Europe, behind only Russia—a fact rarely noted in the corporate media.

Reznikov told one media outlet Tuesday that Ukraine hopes soon to receive military equipment “we have long dreamed of” from a NATO supplier.

The diplomatic shuttle between Washington, Moscow, Kiev and various European capitals remains busy. Beside Johnson in Warsaw, his foreign secretary Liz Truss (touted in right-wing circles as a possible replacement if Johnson is ousted) is traveling to Moscow for talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The purpose of her visit can only be to inflame the conflict, given her statement, released before she boarded a plane, that she plans “to call on the Kremlin to de-escalate and stop the aggression against Ukraine.”

Outside Europe, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Melbourne, Australia, for a meeting of representatives of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, a quasi-alliance of Australia, Japan, India and the United States organized as a gang-up against China. While the meeting was previously scheduled, it will undoubtedly be viewed as the imperialist response to the meeting at the Beijing Olympics on the weekend of Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

While troops on both sides conduct drills in conventional armed conflict, the American media campaign has taken an ominous new turn, with the first references to the possibility of nuclear warfare as the outcome of the crisis.

This came in the form of a lengthy article appearing on the front page of Wednesday’s print edition of the *New York Times*, written by one of the newspaper’s Moscow correspondents, Anton Troianovski. Much of the article was taken up by an effort to portray any action by Russian President Putin, from a full-scale invasion to a diplomatic deal, as part of an implacable long-term plan to seize control of Ukraine. This seems aimed at positioning the US media to intensify its anti-Russia campaign whatever the immediate outcome of the current crisis.

But in the course of the report, Troianovski raises the subject of nuclear war, although he attributes this entirely to Russian foreign policy and military analysts who made such comments. He quotes “Ruslan Pukhov, a Russian military analyst,” predicting “a renewed threat of war” next year even if no armed conflict breaks out soon. “Ukraine in NATO, from my point of view or Russia’s, would be the equivalent of nuclear war,” Pukhov says.

The most explicit and inflammatory remark quoted by the *Times* is attributed to Dmitri Kiselyov, an anchor on Russian state television, who allegedly said Sunday, “Let’s remember that Russia doesn’t need a world without Russia.” He added, “And then not just America, but also Europe, will turn into radioactive ash.” Troianovski describes this language as, at least in part, a paraphrase of a remark made by Putin in 2018.

The import of this article is to inject into the minds of *Times’* readers the idea of nuclear war arising from the crisis, while attributing the danger (of course) to nefarious Russians. This is under conditions where the expansion of NATO—particularly if Ukraine were to be added to the alliance—increasingly follows the map of Hitler’s onslaught on the Soviet Union in 1941–42.

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