

NATO opens Northern front in war against Russia

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On May 16, Sweden and Finland announced an end to decades of neutrality, proclaiming their intention to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its escalating conflict with Russia.

Less than three weeks later, Stockholm, Sweden's capital, has been turned into a naval garrison with the arrival of a US amphibious assault battle group, consisting of the assault ship USS Kearsarge, the dock landing ship USS Gunston Hall, the guided-missile destroyer USS Gravely and the command ship USS Mount Whitney.

Standing on the deck of the Kearsarge, a warship so large it would be classified as a carrier in any Navy besides the United States', Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley declared his intention to make the Baltic Sea, in the words of the *New York Times*, a "NATO lake."

Sweden had remained officially nonaligned since the Napoleonic wars in the early 1800s, having remained neutral in both the First and Second World Wars.

Now, in the span of just weeks, the country has been turned into a new front of the US war with Russia, its cities not only hosting a massive US-NATO military presence, but, just as ominously, targeted by Russian long-range weapons systems.

By pushing for the accession of Finland and Sweden as de facto members of NATO, the United States has opened up a second front in its war against Russia, turning the entire Baltic coast into a powder keg.

The arrival of the ships was part of the BALTOPS 22 exercise, involving, according to NATO, "Fourteen NATO allies, two NATO partner nations, over 45 ships, more than 75 aircraft, and approximately 7,000 personnel." The UK sent HMS Defender, the destroyer that in June 2021 sailed into waters around the Crimean peninsula, triggering a standoff that led to the dropping

of bombs by Russian forces in the ship's path.

US officials made clear that the exercise was to be seen entirely within the framework of the current conflict with Russia.

"In past iterations of BALTOPS we've talked about meeting the challenges of tomorrow," said Vice Adm. Gene Black, commander Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) and the US Sixth Fleet. "Those challenges are upon us—in the here and now."

Using the war in Ukraine as a pretext, the US has sought to double NATO's land border with Russia through the inclusion of Finland.

The US has put into motion plans, years in the making, to turn the entire region into a front line in the war against Russia. This threatens a repetition, on an even grander scale, of the manner in which Ukraine, following the 2014 coup, was transformed into a US/NATO proxy, armed with billions of dollars in weapons.

This turn of events has had horrifying consequences for the people of Ukraine, tens of thousands of whom have died and millions of whom have been displaced as a result of this year's war.

With this development, the sweeping goals of the US/NATO war effort are becoming increasingly clear. They have gone far beyond the aims, first announced by Ukraine in 2021, of regaining Crimea through military means. The United States and NATO seek to seize full control of the Baltic and Black Seas, as part of the drive to dismantle Russia altogether.

In a widely cited article published by *The Atlantic*, Casey Michel, a fellow at the Hudson Institute think tank founded by nuclear war advocate Herman Kahn, approvingly quoted the 1991 proposal by Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to carry out "the dismantlement

not only of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire but of Russia itself, so it could never again be a threat to the rest of the world.”

Michel concludes: “Rather than quash Russia’s imperial aspirations when they had the chance, Bush and his successors simply watched and hoped for the best. We no longer have that luxury. The West must complete the project that began in 1991. It must seek to fully decolonize Russia.”

By mooting the “dismantlement” of Russia, the US media is sending a message: The aim of the war is not just the overthrow of the present government, but the systematic destruction and carve-up of Russia and the hiving off of its strategic mineral and petrochemical resources.

Since signing a \$40 billion weapons package for Ukraine on May 21, the United States has announced an additional \$700 million in weapons, as well as the deployment of M109 self-propelled artillery, Harpoon anti-ship missiles, and medium-range missiles capable of striking targets 50 miles away.

Over the weekend, Russia carried out airstrikes on tanks in Kiev, which Moscow said were provided by NATO members. The airstrikes were launched by aircraft over the Caspian Sea, demonstrating Russia’s capability to strike targets hundreds of miles away.

Last week, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev strongly implied to *al Jazeera* that Russia would carry out strikes against NATO territory if the weapons being supplied by the US and NATO were targeted inside Russia.

“If ... these weapons are used against Russian territory, then our armed forces will have no other choice but to strike decision-making centers,” Medvedev declared. “Of course, it needs to be understood that the final decision-making centers in this case, unfortunately, are not located on the territory of Kiev.”

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the United States would welcome an attack like the one described by Medvedev, which would allow it to remove all remaining restraints on the conduct of the war.

While the geostrategic and economic interests of US imperialism are a major factor in the conflict, the reckless character of the US-NATO policy cannot be understood solely through the lens of geopolitics.

The American ruling class needs a permanent state of war as part of an effort to divert internal social tensions outwards and to enforce a fictional “national unity.” It is now clear that the Biden administration’s ending of the “forever war” in Afghanistan was part of a redeployment and refocus on waging war against Russia and China.

At the same time, the transformation of the “War on Terror” into “great power conflict” entails and requires an escalation of the assault on the working class. All available social resources not taken up by the bailout of the rich must be diverted to the instruments of war. The massive sums allocated by Congress must be paid for by the working class, particularly through attacks on social programs and other government expenditures.

Over the weekend, both the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, house organs for the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, published editorials demanding cuts to social entitlement programs. The *Journal* demanded that millions of people be purged from Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor. The *Washington Post*, for its part, called for a “modest” reduction in Social Security benefits.

But the austerity measures proposed by these newspapers are only the beginning. The American ruling class’s project of global conquest entails a massive restructuring of social relations aimed at making the working class bear the burden of the crisis of capitalism. At the same time, the intensification of the class struggle that is the corollary of expanding war reveals the social force that must be mobilized against war, the working class.

The struggles emerging by workers at workplaces throughout the country for wage increases commensurate with soaring prices must be armed with a program to end a war that is rapidly spiraling out of control and threatening human civilization with destruction.



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