

Amid threats of nuclear provocation

NATO plans escalation against Russia at Vilnius summit

Andre Damon
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Next week, on July 11-12, NATO will hold a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where the military alliance is expected to announce plans to rapidly expand military spending, surge troops to Russia's borders, and dramatically increase its involvement in the war in Ukraine.

At the last NATO summit in June 2022, the alliance pledged to “deliver the full range of forces” needed “for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer competitors.”

Under conditions in which the much vaunted counteroffensive by the Ukrainian military has turned into a protracted debacle, NATO is under pressure to directly intervene in the conflict to ensure its goal of, in the words of a former NATO commander, “breaking the back” of Russia.

Against the backdrop of this supercharged climate, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of mining the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) with the aim of blowing it up.

In a video address published Tuesday, Zelensky said that “every day, we are adding content to the NATO summit that will take place in Vilnius next week,” which will ensure “security in Europe,” before turning to the Zaporizhzhia plant.

Zelensky claimed that “Russian troops have placed objects resembling explosives on the roof of several power units of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.” He accused Russia of aiming to “commit new evil” at the plant, adding, “It is the responsibility of everyone in the world to stop it.”

Contrary to Zelensky's statements, IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said in a statement that no “visible indications of mines or explosives” have

been observed at the plant, which is under monitoring by the organization.

The framing of Zelensky's comments make clear that they are an effort to use any potential incident or provocation at the plant as a pretext for more direct military involvement by NATO in the conflict.

In an article published last week in *Politico*, Ivo Daalder, former US ambassador to NATO, called for the alliance to respond to any “deliberate nuclear incident” with direct intervention into the conflict.

“In case of any deliberate nuclear incident, the US and key NATO allies need to intervene directly and bring the war to a swift and complete end by helping Ukraine restore control over all its territory,” Daalder wrote.

In an article in February on the revelation by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh that the United States and Ukraine had direct involvement in the bombing of the German-Russian Nord Stream pipeline, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the United States could stage a provocation to justify its direct entry into the war:

In 1898, the explosion of the battleship USS Maine in Havana harbor, portrayed as an act of war, was used to launch the Spanish-American War and dispatch troops to Cuba and the Philippines. The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident that prompted direct US involvement in the Vietnam War was fabricated... There is the precedent of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which were used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq and the whole ‘war on

terror.’

The WSWS added:

The bigger the escalation, the bigger the lie... the White House has it entirely within its power to stage a provocation, aimed at galvanizing public support for the war, whether by provoking a Russian response or manufacturing an “attack” out of whole cloth.

It is unclear whether any such provocation will take place ahead of the summit. It is clear, however, that the summit will be used for a significant escalation of the US conflict with Russia.

Ahead of the summit, a group of retired generals and foreign policy officials called on the United States to explicitly back the military reconquest of Crimea and do everything necessary to ensure this takes place.

The letter’s signatories included retired generals Philip Breedlove and Wesley Clark, both NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, as well as Ben Hodges, former commanding general, US Army Europe, and Michael McFaul, former US Ambassador to Russia.

The letter’s signatories also include all of the lead witnesses in the first impeachment of Donald Trump in 2019, which the Democratic Party deliberately centered on claims that Trump was undermining the war preparations against Russia. Among them are Marie Yovanovitch, former US ambassador to Ukraine; Amb. Kurt Volker, former US ambassador to NATO; retired colonel Alexander Vindman; and William B. Taylor, former US ambassador to Ukraine.

Critically, the list also includes Douglas Lute, who in 2022 said the Taliban should be a model for the arming of Ukraine, declaring the US should be “supplying the Ukrainians as Pakistan supplied the Taliban.”

The letter calls on NATO to pledge to “win” the war against Russia and openly assert its effort to militarily reconquer Crimea.

This means taking steps to ensure that

Ukraine 1) wins this war and reestablishes full control over its internationally recognized 1991 borders; and 2) is fully anchored in the security and economic arrangements that from 1945 until 2014 made Europe a continent of peace, prosperity and cooperation. The transatlantic community can only be stable and secure if Ukraine is secure. Ukraine’s entry into NATO, fulfilling the promise made at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, would achieve that.

The letter further demands:

In Vilnius, NATO heads of state and government should offer an unequivocal statement of alliance support for Ukraine and for Kyiv’s aim of regaining sovereignty and territorial integrity within its 1991 borders. They should further underscore their readiness to supply Ukraine weapons — including longer-range missiles such as ATACMS, Western fighter planes and tanks — in sufficient quantities to prevail on the battlefield.

Beyond direct intervention in the conflict, NATO is poised to approve plans to massively expand NATO troops on Russia’s borders. Describing these plans, Politico reported earlier this year that “In the coming months, the alliance will accelerate efforts to stockpile equipment along the alliance’s eastern edge and designate tens of thousands of forces that can rush to allies’ aid on short notice... The numbers will be large, with officials floating the idea of up to 300,000 NATO forces.”

In addition, NATO officials have said that the alliance will institute a “floor” for military spending, with 2 percent of GDP being an absolute minimum for members of the alliance.



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