NATO plots escalation of Ukraine war against Russia into all out war across Europe

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As the NATO imperialist powers back Israel's genocide in Gaza, they are setting into motion an explosion of world war across Europe. At a meeting of NATO army chiefs in Brussels on Thursday, NATO Commander-in-Chief Christopher Cavoli announced Exercise Steadfast Defender, which will begin next week and last until May. This NATO manoeuvre, the largest since the Cold War, is preparation for a total NATO war mobilisation against Russia.

"Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 will be the largest NATO exercise in decades, with participation from approximately 90,000 forces from all 31 Allies and our good partner Sweden," Cavoli said. "The Alliance will demonstrate its ability to reinforce the Euro-Atlantic area via trans-Atlantic movement of forces from North America. This reinforcement will occur during a simulated emerging conflict scenario against a near-peer adversary."

More than 50 warships, including aircraft carriers and destroyers, will take part. There will also be 80 fighters, helicopters and drones and over 1,000 armoured vehicles, including 133 tanks and 533 armoured personnel carriers. Geographically, the exercise extends across Scandinavia and the Baltic states to Poland, Romania and Germany. In addition to the US, individual European states are also sending over 10,000 soldiers. Britain will contribute 20,000 and Germany 12,500.

This is not simply an exercise, but a preparation to escalate NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine into a world war waged across Europe. Top NATO officers are not mincing words. In Brussels, Dutch Admiral Rob Bauer, the chairman of the NATO military committee, demanded "a war fighting transformation of NATO."

"It's not a given that we are in peace," Bauer said. In case of war, he added, "it is the whole of society that will get involved, whether we like it or not."

Bauer praised recent statements by Swedish Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin, who called on the Swedish people to prepare for war. "There could be war in Sweden", Bohlin said. "Are you a private individual? Have you considered whether you have time to join a voluntary defence organisation? If not: get moving!"

Bauer commented: "The fact that people find [the possibility of war] a surprise and as a result buy radios and batteries, that is great … It starts [with] the realization that not everything is plannable, not everything is going to be hunky-dory in the next 20 years."

These modern-day Dr. Strangeloves are planning total war, megalomaniacally pursuing the suicidal aim of militarily defeating Russia, a nuclear-armed power, as an immediate goal.

In a "Memo to the President" titled "A Bold Agenda for the Washington Summit" and published by the influential Atlantic Council think tank, a collection of top retired US ambassadors and military commanders call for a colossal NATO escalation against Russia. "The goal should be unambiguous: Ukraine's victory," they write. They advocate the conquest of Russian-held Crimea and giving Ukraine NATO membership—precisely what the Kremlin went to war in Ukraine to avoid.

After the failure of Ukraine's "counter-offensive" last year, such a policy of conquest would require a massive, overt commitment of NATO troops against Russia. Significantly, the memo insists such an escalation should continue even if it provokes nuclear war:

Russia may threaten to escalate the war in response to a NATO invitation to begin accession talks, including the possible use of nuclear weapons. … NATO should not be self-deterred by Russian nuclear rhetoric. NATO's nuclear deterrent remains strong, and Ukraine has stated its willingness to fight through any Russian

escalation.

Indeed, NATO is also accelerating training exercises to wage nuclear war. Last October, 60 NATO planes in Italy, Croatia and the Mediterranean joined an exercise titled "Steadfast Noon," practicing bombing runs they would make to drop nuclear weapons on their targets.

As in the two world wars of the 20th century, the imperialist ruling elites feel that they have little time, and that only rapid escalation can counteract powerful political forces—in the military situation and the international class struggle—that are working against them.

European media that support war with Russia now admit that NATO faces disaster in Ukraine. Even with NATO weapons, Ukraine cannot realistically hope to defeat numerically superior Russian forces, but only to hold them off in a grinding war of attrition that Ukraine, with its far smaller population, would eventually lose. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are dead, and, while Zelensky tells NATO his government is willing to fight in a nuclear war, he fears internal revolt. The *Financial Times* of London admits:

> Ukrainian army chiefs have asked Volodymyr Zelenskyy to mobilise up to 500,000 people as the country gears up for a protracted war of attrition against Russia next year. … But until now, Zelensky has been reluctant to resort to more extensive conscription, fearing it could stoke social tensions.

This November's US presidential elections, in which polls show Trump or other Republican candidates leading Democratic incumbent Joe Biden, makes the situation even more explosive. Some sections of the Republican party have opposed funding Ukraine as a distraction from Washington's military buildup against China. Factions of the ruling class calling to escalate the war are seeking to create facts on the ground so that a potential incoming Trump administration could not back out of the NATO-Russia war.

Above all, the NATO planners are terrified by the rise of the class struggle. The cut-off of Russian energy exports to Europe led to a massive hike in energy prices, with prices in the euro zone alone rising 18 percent since the war began. Together with cuts to social spending as NATO governments transfer hundreds of billions of dollars or euros to military spending, this drove an international eruption of strikes and protests.

2023 saw historic strikes and struggles—by US autoworkers, film writers, and railworkers; by millions of workers in Germany, Britain, and across Europe, including by French workers against pension cuts; and global protests against Israeli genocide against Gaza. The first weeks of 2024 have seen not only escalating protests over Gaza, but a train drivers' strike, farmers' protests and mass demonstrations against the far-right in Germany.

Nonetheless, a substantial gap still exists between mass consciousness and the imminent dangers posed by the emerging Third World War. Workers cannot resolve the global crisis within the capitalist nation-state system, under the control of national labor bureaucracies and pseudo-left political parties that negotiate with capitalist governments and support the war effort.

The central task is the independent mobilization and unification of the working class in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, the Americas and internationally against imperialist war and to bring down their "own" capitalist governments.

Waging such a struggle requires building the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the Trotskyist movement, as the revolutionary leadership of the working class. NATO's inciting of war between two former Soviet republics, Ukraine and Russia, and its plans for nuclear war expose the bankruptcy of the social order that emerged from the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It poses the necessity of a renewed international struggle for workers' power and socialism, in the traditions of the October revolution.

Aligning the historical consciousness and the struggles of the working class with a perspective of revolutionary socialist opposition to a Third World War is the task of the Trotskyist vanguard. The ICFI will intervene in this year's European elections, fighting to build sections of the ICFI across Europe and unify workers internationally in a struggle for world socialist revolution.

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