

White House proclaims “new era” of nuclear weapons “without numerical constraints”

Andre Damon
17 June 2024

In an interview with Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* published Monday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made it clear that expanding the number of deployed nuclear weapons, in response to both Russia and China, was the central subject of discussion at last week’s NATO defense ministers’ summit.

“I won’t go into operational details about how many nuclear warheads should be operational and which should be stored, but we need to consult on these issues,” Stoltenberg said. “That’s exactly what we’re doing at NATO, for instance at meetings in NATO, a nuclear planning group as we had during the defence ministerial meeting this [last] week.”

At a White House briefing Monday ahead of a scheduled visit by Stoltenberg for talks with Biden focusing on the war against Russia in Ukraine, spokesman John Kirby refused to deny Stoltenberg’s statement when asked whether “the President has taken part in consultations about deployment of more nuclear weapons.”

In a follow-up question, Kirby was asked, “How can [Stoltenberg’s statement] not be perceived as provocation or an escalation?” He replied by saying, “NATO is a defensive alliance,” and since he had uttered these magic words, its actions by definition could not be a “provocation” or “escalation.”

Stoltenberg’s statements come 10 days after Pranay Vaddi, senior director for arms control at the National Security Council, speaking to the Arms Control Association, proclaimed a “new era” for nuclear arms in which the US would deploy nuclear weapons “without numerical constraints.”

Condemning “national weakness,” Vaddi said, “we may reach a point in the coming years where an increase from the current deployed numbers is required.” He continued, “We will have no choice ... We’re modernizing each leg of our nuclear triad, updating our nuclear command control and communication systems, and investing in our nuclear enterprise.”

The US media, in line with the official propaganda of the

Biden administration, has framed the semi-official decision by the Biden administration to abandon all limits on the deployment of nuclear weapons as a response to unexpected actions of Russia and China.

It is no such thing. Instead, it is the consummation of a years-long plan to massively expand the US nuclear arsenal, which US think tanks christened in 2016 as a “second nuclear age,” language that was echoed six years later in the Biden administration’s proclamation of a nuclear “new era.”

In its lead editorial published online Monday afternoon, the *Washington Post* laid stress on this impending nuclear escalation, calling attention to a largely unreported speech by Vaddi. The *Post* editorial board statement was published under the headline, “If you liked ‘Dr. Strangelove,’ you’ll find the new arms race thrilling.”

Both Vaddi and the *Post* editorial sought to portray a possible “breakout” of a new nuclear arms race as the product of Russian aggression in Ukraine and Chinese decisions to greatly increase the size of their own nuclear arsenal, although it is still dwarfed by the destructive power of Russia and the United States.

Stoltenberg’s comments after the NATO summit make it clear that the nuclear escalation is not idle talk about “the coming years,” but refers to decisions that have already been largely finalized. As is usual in American politics, by the time the public hears that a decision is being “considered,” it has already been made, and all that is necessary is the proper media messaging to announce it to the public.

In 2016, the Obama administration and the Republican-controlled Congress launched a bipartisan plan to spend trillions of dollars modernizing every single aspect of the US nuclear arsenal, from its intercontinental ballistic missiles, to its ballistic missile submarines, to the fighters that would deliver nuclear bombs and missiles.

In this “second nuclear age,” one think tank wrote, combatants would “think through how they might actually employ a nuclear weapon, both early in a conflict and in a discriminate manner.”

Over the ensuing eight years, it has become clear that the

nuclear rearmament initiated under Obama, then escalated under Trump and Biden, involves systematic efforts by the US to move its nuclear weapons and missile defense capabilities ever closer to their targets in Moscow and Beijing.

Over this period, NATO built two missile bases in Eastern Europe, in Poland and in Romania, capable of shooting down Russian ballistic missiles in the event of a nuclear war, as well as having the theoretical capability to deploy nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

In 2019, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which constrained its ability to push nuclear weapons up to the border of Russia and China. The US has worked systematically to ring China with missiles, facilitating massive new long-range weapons deployments in Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Stoltenberg's remarks point to the extremely dangerous and reckless character of the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, D.C., which is expected to massively expand direct US participation in the war against Russia. In remarks in Washington after his arrival Monday, Stoltenberg implied that the present period is analogous to the decisions by US President Woodrow Wilson to send US combat troops to Europe in the First World War and by Franklin D. Roosevelt to send US troops to Europe and the Pacific in World War II:

President Wilson... wanted to keep the US out of the 'Great War.' But he eventually changed course, realizing that America could never be safe without a Europe at peace. Just two decades later, Franklin D. Roosevelt promised not to send American boys to yet another war in Europe and to maintain America's neutrality. But after Pearl Harbor, he decided otherwise. So twice when Europe has been at war, the US chose isolationism. And twice, it realized that this did not work. That was true then, and it is even more true today.

In light of recent developments, these statements are chilling. Last month, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Charles Q. Brown told the *New York Times* that the NATO military alliance will "eventually" send significant numbers of active-duty NATO troops to Ukraine.

This was followed by the announcement by French President Emmanuel Macron that he is seeking to form a "coalition" of NATO members to send troops to Ukraine, and the decision by the United States to allow Ukraine to use NATO weapons to strike inside Russia.

The implications of Stoltenberg's remarks, therefore, are that just as in World War I and World War II, when Democratic US presidents sent hundreds of thousands of American troops to fight in Europe, a similar scenario is around the corner.

But unlike the previous two world wars, a full-scale war in Europe against Russia and in Asia against China would be fought against countries with significant nuclear arsenals of their own.

In this context, the Biden administration and NATO are making clear that they will go to any length to achieve their aims. In his remarks, Stoltenberg was blunt about the US goals in the war in Ukraine:

Ensuring Ukraine prevails... serves US security interests. By allocating a small fraction of its defense budget, the United States helps Ukraine to destroy a significant share of Russia's offensive combat capabilities, without putting a single American soldier in harm's way.

This tactic has, however, run its course. Ukraine has been bled white, and NATO has, to use the words of Senator Lindsey Graham, fought Russia "to the last Ukrainian." Now, with Russian forces advancing across the front, preventing the collapse of the decade-long imperialist effort to turn Ukraine into a bastion against Russia requires a dramatic escalation of direct US-NATO involvement in the conflict.

By raising the prospect of direct US and NATO involvement in the war, together with the implicit threat to use nuclear weapons to achieve the United States' goals, the Biden administration is making clear that there are no limits to the number of lives—whether Ukrainian or Russian, European or American—that world imperialism is prepared to sacrifice in pursuit of its aims of global domination.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact