

# Obama, NATO escalate anti-Russian campaign over Ukraine

By Patrick Martin  
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In separate statements in the US and Europe, President Obama and NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen ratcheted up the threats by US and European imperialism against Russia. Their statements came on the eve of four-party talks set for Thursday in Geneva, with the US, the European Union and their Ukrainian puppet regime facing off against Moscow.

Obama gave an interview to Major Garrett of CBS News, who asked a series of provocative questions suggesting that the White House should step up its campaign of economic warfare against Russia. Before the interview, the White House announced that a new round of economic sanctions had been “prepared” for use against Russia if there was no progress in resolving the crisis in Ukraine.

Obama told CBS that it was “absolutely clear” that Russia had violated Ukrainian sovereignty in annexing Crimea and that it was continuing to do so by supporting “non-state militias” in southern and eastern Ukraine, where there is overwhelming popular hostility to the US-backed right-wing regime in Kiev.

Offering no proof for his accusations against Russia, Obama declared: “What I’ve said consistently is that each time Russia takes these kinds of steps, that are designed to destabilize Ukraine and violate their sovereignty, that there are going to be consequences, and what you have already seen is the Russian economy weaker, capital fleeing out of Russia.”

In language that suggested possible US support for future Ukrainian membership in NATO—a radical break from previous policy—Obama said, “We don’t need a war. What we do need is a recognition that countries like Ukraine can have relationships with a whole range of their neighbors and it is not up to anybody whether it is Russia or anybody else to make decisions for them.”

This declaration is remarkable for its hypocrisy, since

US government officials have been “making decisions” for Ukraine, including who should head its government. Tapes of phone conversations between the US ambassador and State Department official Victoria Nuland indicated that they had already selected the man who is now Ukrainian prime minister—Arseniy Yatseniuk, or “Yats”, as they familiarly termed him—during the US-backed protests that installed the current regime in Kiev.

More ominously, CIA Director John Brennan visited Kiev secretly last week for discussions on how to deal with the popular movement in eastern Ukraine. Coming out of those sessions, both interim president Oleksandr Turchynov and prime minister Yatseniuk denounced the anti-Kiev activists in the east as “terrorists” and ordered in the armed forces, commanded by a general who threatened the “destruction” of the opposition.

Given that Brennan heads the world’s largest organization dedicated to assassination and provocation, and previously worked at the Obama White House directing drone missile attacks on people identified as “terrorists”, his discussions in Kiev were undoubtedly focused on demonizing the political opposition to Kiev as criminals, and engineering a bloody outcome to the crisis.

The threat of military escalation came after a NATO meeting Wednesday in Brussels. NATO Secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that the US-dominated military alliance would increase air patrols over the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—all former Soviet republics that border on Russia. This would represent an escalation of previous actions, which included dispatching warplanes to Poland and the Baltic states, and deploying AWACS surveillance aircraft in Poland and Romania.

“You will see deployments at sea, in the air, on land

to take place immediately—that means within days,” Rasmussen said. “We will have more planes in the air, more ships in the water, and more readiness on the land. More will follow, if needed, in the weeks and months to come.”

These deployments will include NATO warships off the coast of the Baltic states and in the eastern Mediterranean.

All indications are that the Geneva talks are not intended to resolve the crisis, but rather will be the occasion for further provocations against Russia. The acting foreign minister for the right-wing Ukrainian regime, Andriy Deshchytsia, said he would demand Russia return Crimea to Ukraine and rescind the decision of the Russian parliament authorizing Russian troops to deploy to Ukraine if President Vladimir Putin deemed it necessary to protect the Russian population in that country.

Claims by US, NATO and Ukrainian officials of “Russian involvement” in Ukraine are both completely hypocritical—given the record of US-EU subversion in Kiev—and deeply cynical. With the assistance of the compliant media in both the US and Europe, the imperialist powers are manufacturing a red herring to divert attention from their own operations and maneuvers.

Russia and Ukraine are deeply intertwined by common history, culture, economic ties and geography. In eastern Ukraine, particularly, where the majority of the population speaks Russian as its native tongue, and intermarriages are commonplace, to speak of ethnically distinct populations is absurd.

It is hardly surprising that the seizure of power by ultra-right Ukrainian nationalists, spearheaded by open fascists, anti-Russian chauvinists and anti-Semites, whose first significant policy decision was to prohibit official use of the Russian language, should provoke popular opposition, especially in the Russian-speaking east and south.

As for the claims that this popular opposition is “instigated” or “fomented” by Russia, the Putin regime, based on billionaire oligarchs, is hostile to any genuine popular movement in eastern Ukraine, a stronghold of the industrial working class, which might spill across the border and intensify the class struggle within Russia itself. If the Russian armed forces were eventually to intervene in eastern Ukraine, it would be

to suppress such a popular movement before it could get out of control.

The imperialist powers and their stooges in Kiev regard the population of eastern Ukraine with undisguised loathing. It is worth recalling again the statement by interim president Turchynov on his website Tuesday, in which he admitted, “Apart from Russian Special Forces and terrorists, there’s hundreds of thousands of innocent Ukrainian people deceived by Russian propaganda.”

The military actions ordered by Kiev pose the danger of a full-scale bloodbath to crush broad sections of the eastern Ukrainian population who distrust and oppose the Kiev regime. Casualties have already been reported earlier this week in Kramatorsk and Slovyansk. On Wednesday, press reports indicated that Ukrainian soldiers opened fire on protesters in Mariupol, a city of 600,000 on the Sea of Azov, killing one person and wounding 12 more.

There were reports of Ukrainian troops balking at instructions to fire, and even fraternizing with the local population.

Such defections will only intensify the effort to mobilize ultra-right and neo-Nazi elements against the working class.

The head of the Ukrainian National Security Council, Andriy Parubiy, a leader of the anti-Semitic Svoboda party, sent out a message on Twitter saying that veterans of the coup in Kiev, many of whom were members of right-wing nationalist groups, being mobilized to join the fight. “Reserve unit of National Guard formed from #Maidan Self-defense volunteers was sent to the front line this morning,” he wrote.

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