

At NATO summit, US and Europe threaten Russia, plan military action against ISIS

By Jordan Shilton
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The first day of NATO's summit in Wales was dominated by scheming against Russia and preparations for military action in Iraq and Syria.

On Thursday, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that member states had agreed to 15 million euros in direct military aid to Ukraine. The "comprehensive and tailored package of measures" is designed to assist in the "improvement of logistics, the improvement of command and control, the improvement of communications, and cyber defense." The aid includes "high precision weapons."

At the same time, the US and the European Union are preparing a new round of sanctions against Russia, to be unveiled today.

The aggressive tone of the summit was set by a joint statement published in the *Times* newspaper by British Prime Minister David Cameron and US President Barack Obama. The heads of the two imperialist states portrayed NATO as an alliance encircled by threats and enemies that must be prepared to take decisive action to defend its interests. "As Russia holds a gun to Ukraine and Islamic extremists commit despicable murder, NATO must strengthen its alliance," the statement began.

"We meet at a time when the world faces many dangerous and evolving challenges. To the east, Russia has ripped up the rulebook with its illegal, self-declared annexation of Crimea and its troops on Ukrainian soil threatening a sovereign nation state. To the south, there is an arc of instability from north Africa and the Sahel to the Middle East," the statement read.

One would hardly guess from such a declaration that the central role in creating the crises both in Eastern Europe and the Middle East has been played by NATO's leading powers, above all the United States.

The US and Germany organised a fascist-led coup in

Ukraine in February in an attempt to bring Kiev under their sphere of influence and set in train the present conflict with Russia. In the Middle East, the very forces now denounced as "extremists" and "terrorists" were hailed only last year as "rebels" fighting for a democratic transition in Syria against the government of Bashar al-Assad.

None of this was going to get in the way of Cameron's and Obama's plans to intensify NATO's aggressive stance towards Moscow. With unparalleled cynicism, Obama and Cameron declared, "With Russia trying to force a sovereign state to abandon its right to democracy at the barrel of a gun, we should support Ukraine's right to determine its own democratic future and continue our efforts to strengthen Ukrainian capabilities."

The reference to Kiev's "capabilities" was a fairly unambiguous commitment to stepped up military assistance. Last weekend, it was announced that Britain would take the lead with six other NATO members in developing a joint expeditionary force, while a rapid reaction force of 4,000 is to be established to intervene anywhere within two days.

Cameron and Obama left no doubt in their statement that such moves are aimed at Russia, writing, "We must use our military to ensure a persistent presence in Eastern Europe, making clear to Russia that we will always uphold our article 5 commitments to collective self-defence."

Cameron and Obama pointedly raised the issue of defence spending, noting that only four NATO members spent at least 2 percent of economic output on their militaries. This was directed in particular at Germany, which spends 1.3 percent of its GDP on defence.

The intensifying militarist agenda is vastly at odds

with the sentiments of the majority of the population, which is overwhelmingly opposed to war. This was starkly illustrated by the manner in which the NATO meeting is being held, with leaders gathering like criminals behind a ten-foot high steel ring surrounding the Celtic Manor resort in Newport, Wales, guarded by a vast mobilization of police and military forces.

At the nominal initiative of Poland and other Eastern European members, the summit is likely to agree to the storing of ammunition, fuel and rotating forces at military bases on Russia's border. This is to avoid formally breaking the 1997 Founding Act of the NATO-Russian Council, in which NATO undertook not to station combat troops permanently in the east. Given the creation of the rapid response force and the preparations for troops to be received in Poland and the Baltic countries, such assurances are meaningless in practice.

Individual NATO members are, moreover, deepening their intervention in Ukraine. According to the German daily *Die Welt*, discussions will take place at the summit on a joint British-German plan to aid the Ukrainian army. The so-called C4 fund would seek to modernise Ukraine's command and control structures, and would be led by British and German officers.

Such proposals will only heighten the danger of a direct clash between Russian and NATO forces, which could lead to a war breaking out.

Although Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko gave his verbal commitment to a ceasefire plan on the sidelines of the NATO summit, due to come in to force today, Kiev's armed forces continued to engage in bloody clashes with separatist fighters near the city of Mariupol yesterday. Gunshots and loud explosions were heard on the outskirts, and there were reports that Ukrainian soldiers had erected roadblocks to prevent a separatist advance on the town.

NATO is also planning coordinated action to escalate military intervention in Iraq and Syria. In their *Times* comment, Obama and Cameron stated, "developments in other parts of the world, particularly in Iraq and Syria, threaten our security at home. And NATO is not just an alliance of friends who come to the aid of each other in times of need. It is also an alliance based on national self-interest."

In separate comments, Cameron urged NATO allies to take action against ISIS, adding that he would

consider bombing targets in Syria without the permission of Assad.

Rasmussen added in his press conference, "I do believe the international community as a whole has an obligation to stop Islamic State from advancing further," he said. "There has been no request for NATO involvement," Rasmussen went on, but if the Iraqi government made such a request, it would be "considered seriously."

The Iraqi government duly obliged, providing a request for NATO assistance within fifteen minutes of Rasmussen's press conference concluding.

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