

NATO intensifies threats against Russia over Ukraine

By Christoph Dreier
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NATO countries have stepped up their threats against Russia on the eve of the G20 summit in Australia. While they accuse the country of violating Ukrainian sovereignty, they are themselves preparing a massive escalation of military violence.

In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper on Friday, new NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg accused Russia of undermining “the value-based security architecture in Europe”. Russian President Vladimir Putin had “in any case, promoted the flare-up of conflict [in eastern Ukraine].”

Specifically, Stoltenberg accused the Kremlin of providing the separatists in the east of Ukraine with heavy weapons and soldiers. NATO has observed that, “Russia has again brought arms, equipment, artillery, tanks and rockets over the border into Ukraine”, he claimed. On Wednesday, NATO Supreme Commander Philip Breedlove declared there was no longer any doubt that Russia was intervening militarily in Ukraine.

The same day, US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki spoke of “continuing, ongoing and blatant violations of the Minsk Accord by Russia and its representatives”. She announced the United States was taking a tough stance. In early September in Minsk, the Ukrainian government and the separatists had agreed to a ceasefire and to far-reaching autonomy for the east of the country. Both have not yet been implemented.

Representatives of the Ukrainian government, which came to power in February this year as the result of a coup orchestrated by the West, joined in the chorus. The Ukrainian ambassador to the UN, Yuriy Sergeyev, wrote on Twitter, “I believe that the UN must be informed as soon as possible about the fact that Russia is planning a full-scale invasion in Ukraine.”

The Ukrainian Ambassador to the OSCE, Ihor Prokopchuk, warned of “unpredictable threats to the

security of Europe” resulting from the Russian activities. The spokesman for the National Security Council, Andriy Lysenko, even said that Ukraine was preparing for an attack by Russia from the Black Sea.

Neither government representatives nor the NATO Secretary General provided concrete evidence for these accusations. On Wednesday, Russia rejected the allegations. These were “nothing but hot air,” said Major General Igor Konashenkov. “All this is not based on facts.” The separatists also contradicted reports of military support from Russia.

Earlier this week, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has an observer mission deployed on the ground, spoke only of military convoys that had been moving westward inside the separatist region. Moreover, the border with Russia has seen increased crossings by uniformed personnel in both directions. They have, however, been unarmed.

According to both parties to the conflict, the fighting in the region has persisted. Again and again there have been heavy artillery attacks on Donetsk. On Thursday, for the first time, the Kiev regime admitted to also carrying out military actions behind the front line.

Fierce fighting has continued around Donetsk airport, which was actually ceded to the separatists in the Minsk Accord. However, the Ukrainian units have refused to withdraw and have engaged in fierce fighting with the rebel forces ever since.

In the fighting on Thursday, at least four Ukrainian soldiers were killed, according to government figures. The separatists spoke of numerous civilians being killed in the attacks on Donetsk. The OSCE reported that the separatists had been able to make some territorial gains.

The allegations that Russia is stoking up the conflict clearly serve NATO’s efforts to cover up its own

aggressive plans. Since February's fascist-backed coup, the NATO states have systematically worked at rolling back Russian influence and incorporating Ukraine into their own sphere of interest.

Now they are preparing for further escalation. "I see my main task in preparing military action", Ukrainian Defence Minister Stepan Poltorak said at a cabinet meeting. Ukraine had to prepare "to fight"; Kiev was ready to take "unpredictable actions".

On Thursday, an adviser to Ukrainian Interior Minister Sorjan Schkirjak said that the Ukrainian army had spent \$65 million on heavy military technology in the last week alone, which would be moved "to the front line" in the near future and used against the separatists in Donbass.

A day later in an interview with the *Rheinische Post*, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin praised Ukraine's comprehensive military upgrade. "We now have thousands of soldiers who can fight, and have already proven this", Klimkin said. "I'm sure that if it were necessary, these units could act effectively against the terrorists supported by Russian soldiers."

According to a Ukrainian television report, the regime is working to make old howitzers battle-ready. The gun has a calibre of 203 millimetres and a range of 50 kilometres. With their help, the Ukrainian army could attack rebel-held areas from outside the official demilitarized zone.

NATO has also announced a more aggressive approach towards Russia. There will be more patrol flights and more troop rotations through Eastern Europe, according to Stoltenberg in the *Bild* interview. To enhance the troops' preparedness, more manoeuvres were held. "Every second day, a new NATO military exercise begins", the secretary general of the alliance said. NATO states would also have to "spend more on their defence", as security cannot be had for free, he added.

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the minister of defence of NATO member Estonia, Sven Mikser, demanded a greater NATO presence in his country. As in the Cold War, Russia should be deterred militarily. "When you're dealing with a regime like Putin's, weakness is far more provocative than strength," Mikser said.

The sabre-rattling is being accompanied by threats of new economic sanctions against Russia. "Russia's

actions in Ukraine are unacceptable," British Prime Minister David Cameron said on Friday in the Australian capital of Canberra. "If Russia continues to worsen the situation, we could intensify the sanctions," he added. The United States threatened to add further Russian politicians to the sanctions list.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who will meet Putin on the fringes of the G20 meeting, had already expressed similar comments regarding the crisis in Ukraine. She attacked Putin at a press conference in Auckland, New Zealand. Russia was not upholding the Minsk Accord, and was breaching the "territorial integrity of Ukraine," the chancellor said. "That worries me a lot." On Monday, the 28 EU foreign ministers meet to discuss further sanctions against Russia.

Meanwhile, the separatists have called on the Kiev government to resume talks on the Minsk Accord, at which representatives of both the OSCE and Russia will be involved. "We are willing to travel in the next few days and to return to work", said Denis Puschilin, the spokesman of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk, adding, "The problem is that the Ukrainian side is taking so long to respond."

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