

Pentagon chief outlines war preparations against Russia

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The announcement by US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter in advance of this week's NATO defense ministers meeting that the US will preposition heavy military equipment and soldiers in Eastern European and Baltic countries bordering Russia heightens the danger of war between the world's major nuclear powers.

Speaking in the Estonian capital Tallinn on Tuesday, Carter announced the deployment of Abrams tanks, Bradley armored vehicles, heavy artillery and other military equipment—enough to equip 5,000 troops—to Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He also announced the build-up of NATO's cyberwar capabilities, saying, "We must prepare NATO and our allies for cyber challenges, particularly from Russia."

The day before, Carter spoke at a military-security think tank in Berlin and said that NATO was refocusing its strategic orientation for a long-term confrontation with Russia. Denouncing what he called Russian "aggression" in Ukraine, he spoke of a "new play book" and declared, "We will stand up to Russia's actions and their attempts to reestablish a Soviet-era sphere of influence."

He said the US would contribute bombers, fighter jets, surveillance drones, Special Operations troops and other military resources to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The VJTF, announced by NATO last year, is tasked with intervening militarily against Russia, once called upon, in a matter of days.

Carter also declared that Russia was in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The United States is considering a range of military responses to Russia's alleged violation, which it denies, including a possible first strike against nuclear missiles inside Russia.

In fact, it is Washington and its NATO allies who are

in flagrant breach of international accords, specifically the 1997 NATO Russia Founding Act, which gave Moscow guarantees against the alliance's eastward expansion being used to militarily threaten Russia.

Having laid out measures that unambiguously point toward war, Carter cynically declared, "We do not seek a cold, let alone a hot war with Russia. We do not seek to make Russia an enemy."

As the adage goes, actions speak louder than words. The moves announced this week are transparently aggressive preparations for military conflict. They are being carried out, moreover, in a region that is bristling with arms, raising the danger that a relatively minor clash between NATO and Russian forces could rapidly escalate into a full-scale war, threatening the entire world with a nuclear holocaust.

Led by the United States, NATO is already conducting military exercises all along Russia's western border, from the Arctic Ocean to the Baltic and Black seas. Scores of incidents involving NATO and Russian planes and ships have already occurred. In Germany, Carter boasted that this week alone the US was involved in 20 different military exercises in the region.

Carter's trip came at the conclusion of the BALTOPS exercises involving 6,000 troops from 17 countries participating in land, sea and air exercises in the area bordering the Baltic Sea. Soldiers practiced an amphibious assault in Ustka, Poland, approximately 100 miles from the Russian territory of Kaliningrad. US nuclear-capable B-52 bombers participated in military exercises in Latvia, dropping dummy bombs on targets less than 200 miles from the Russian border.

Carter's announcements coincided with the decision on Monday by the European Union to extend economic sanctions against Russia for six months. The announcement came on the anniversary of the Nazi

invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, a national holiday in Russia called the Day of Memory and Grief.

In response to these new provocations by the US and NATO, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused NATO of “coming to our borders.” The head of Russia’s Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, said, “They would like very much to see Russia cease to exist as a country.”

All of the post-Soviet governments in the Baltics and Eastern Europe set to receive US arms and troops are right-wing, anti-Russian and highly unstable. They are beset by internal crises, as they carry out brutal austerity policies in the face of popular opposition. This heightens the danger of a provocation being staged by one or more of these governments to provoke Russian retaliations and create a pretext for war.

By stationing weapons and troops and pledging to intervene militarily against Russia to defend these governments, US imperialism is placing the fate of the people of America and the entire world in immense danger. It is being done, moreover, entirely behind the backs of the population, without public discussion or debate and without even the formality of congressional authorization (which would be granted if requested by the military).

Just last week, a poll released by the Pew Foundation found broad opposition to the war drive. Fifty-eight percent of Germans, 53 percent of the French population and 51 percent of Italians opposed fighting a war against Russia in defense of a NATO ally.

The official US line, uniformly promoted by the media, is that all of these moves are defensive responses to Russian aggression. This lie turns reality on its head.

The aggressors are the US and NATO. The current crisis was triggered by the Maidan coup of February 2014 that toppled the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich.

The coup was orchestrated by Washington and Berlin and spearheaded by fascist militias that venerate Ukrainian nationalist forces that collaborated with the Nazi occupation and anti-Jewish genocide in World War II. When Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the east of the country rose up in opposition to the ultra-right regime in Kiev, the US puppet government launched a bloody civil war with the full support of Washington.

The coup itself was the culmination of US imperialist policy since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which has centered on a relentless drive to isolate, weaken and surround Russia in order to bring the vast resources of Eurasia under US domination.

This has included the eastward expansion of NATO to encompass the former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltic States. It has involved a series of aggressive actions and wars against Russia’s allies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, including the first Gulf War (1991) against Iraq, the breakup of Yugoslavia and war against Serbia (1999), the so-called “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine (2003-2004), the Georgian attack on Russian forces (2008), the sanctions and war threats against Iran, and the US-backed civil war against the Syrian regime.

There is nothing progressive in the response of the Putin regime. An instrument of oligarchs who enriched themselves by plundering state assets during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism, the Russian government vacillates between appeals to the West for a deal and military bluster, while it seeks to whip up nationalism at home to divert attention from its attacks on the social conditions of Russian workers. Incapable of making an appeal to the working class of Europe and America, its policies complement the warmongering of Washington and NATO.

Imperialism is dragging mankind toward the abyss of a Third World War. Only the international working class can stop it, by mobilizing its strength in opposition to war and the system that breeds it, capitalism.

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