

UK seeks leading role in military campaign against Russia

By Julie Hyland
3 July 2015

On Wednesday, the UK Defence Secretary Michael Fallon hinted strongly that there could be a delay in withdrawing all British troops from Germany, which have been stationed in the western part of the country since the Second World War. Following German reunification, Britain has steadily decreased the numbers with a stated intent of full withdrawal by 2019. However, approximately 20,000 remain in the largest concentration of permanent British forces stationed outside the UK.

Speaking before the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Fallon claimed that the review was in response to “considerable pressure from our eastern allies in NATO” due to Russian “aggression” in Ukraine. The *Financial Times* reported that Fallon suggested that he shared the concerns of Mungo Melvin, an associate fellow at RUSI, who said, “Simple mathematics will tell you that if you keep forces in Germany, it’s a lot easier to get them further east.”

Fallon’s remarks are a significant escalation of British provocations against Russia. Last week, the defence secretary announced that the UK was stepping up its involvement in a “training programme” for Ukraine’s armed forces involving the provision of “non-lethal aid”, including infantry skills, logistics, tactical intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities.

The British moves are part of NATO’s military encirclement of Russia, spearheaded by the right-wing US puppet government in Kiev. At last week’s NATO summit, the alliance agreed to facilitate the deployment of a new 5,000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), tasked with mobilizing against Russia within two days. Britain is committed to sending 1,000 military personnel as part of the task force, codenamed “Spearhead”, to become operational next year.

Fallon’s statements come after mounting demands in

military and intelligence circles for Britain to take a more leading role in the campaign against Russia. This is underscored by a report issued last month by Chatham House, the top British military and intelligence think-tank. Comprising essays by six authors, it sets out to address what western governments must do to meet the “Russian Challenge.”

The authors are exorcised above all by the need to establish a unified western policy against Russia, under conditions in which they acknowledge it is difficult to define what constitutes the “west” and grounds for a common agreement.

There can be no accommodation or compromise with a Russia headed by President Vladimir Putin, it states. “Russia, on its present course, cannot be a partner or ally ... differences outweigh any common interests,” it asserts.

The report claims that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has sought to establish itself as “an independent Great Power resuming its geopolitical position on its own terms.” It accuses western governments of indulging “in the fantasy that Russia [post-USSR] was progressing towards a liberal-democratic model.” The war in Ukraine is allegedly “part, the result of the West’s laissez-faire approach to Russia.”

In reality, the Russian ruling elite—utterly parasitic in character and fundamentally concerned with protecting its ill-gotten wealth from the theft of formerly nationalized Soviet property and control over the country’s vast natural resources—has continually sought an accommodation with the west. Wholly dependent upon the global financial system for the preservation of its riches, access to world markets and continued exploitation of the working class, Moscow has striven to ameliorate tensions with the US and NATO for

years, even as it has been forced to acknowledge that the latter are working towards the dismemberment of the country. The Putin regime and the Russian ruling elite as a whole—born out of the dissolution of the USSR and the final liquidation of all the conquests of the 1917 Russian Revolution—are directly responsible for facilitating the very imperialist machinations that now threaten the country and all of humanity with the prospect of nuclear war.

The Chatham report notes, for instance, that for the first three and a half years of Putin's presidency, Russia sought to bolster relations with NATO and the European Union. Russia lined up with the "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, with Putin arguing that the "period of confrontation" was over and that "in the world today, no one intends to be hostile towards us. ..."

Even at the time of the 2003 pre-emptive war against Iraq, Putin spoke of a new "global partnership," accepting the incorporation of former Soviet republics Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the European Union in 2004. The expansion would "not just bring us closer geographically, but also economically and spiritually. ... This means new markets and new investment. Generally it means new possibilities for the future of Greater Europe," he said.

According to the Chatham report, from mid-2003 a change began to take place in the Kremlin's "mood." While it cites rising oil prices as the reason behind Russia's alleged desire to "to restore its historical role as an independent Great Power," the authors are compelled to acknowledge increasingly hostile moves on the part of Washington and its key allies towards Moscow.

This includes the Bush administration's decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in June 2002, and its plans to deploy a missile defence system in Europe. In November 2003, the European Union and the US opposed a Russian-backed settlement in divided Moldova. In subsequent years, "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine saw the installation of pro-Western regimes in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. In 2008, the US-backed regime of Mikheil Saakashvili provoked a war with Russia over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia. The year 2011 saw US-led provocations against the Russia-allied Assad regime in Syria and the invasion of

Ukraine. In September 2012 US presidential candidate Mitt Romney labelled Russia 'our number one geopolitical foe,'" the Chatham authors note.

The Chatham report authors do a poor job of attempting to cover up the fact that they support the overthrow of Putin. Noting with satisfaction the growing economic crisis in Russia, they write, "the regime is now facing the most serious challenge of its 15 years in power. Over time, economic pressures, combined with the unsustainable extent of top-level corruption, will generate a growing imperative for change." The west, they note, has not the "desire or the means to protect Putin's regime against change, whether managed or violent."

The report spells out how western policy in Ukraine is central to this perspective. The sanctions imposed by the US and the EU over Ukraine are "an attempt to put pressure on him from above and below in the full knowledge that this might eventually lead to his downfall." The essential policy tools of the west in Ukraine, they state, "are force and the threat of force."

Far from Russia being welcomed into the capitalist club, as the criminal layer that rules the country had hoped, the imperialist powers are bent on asserting their domination over the Russian landmass and its resources. The Russian ruling elite is utterly incapable of mounting any sort of progressive defence of the working class of this region against these rapacious appetites. It responds to them with a combination of renewed pleas for an accommodation and military threats of its own.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>