

Massive NATO war game risks conflict with Russia

By Johannes Stern
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In advance of next month's NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland, the western military alliance has organised a massive military build-up in Eastern Europe, heightening the danger of a military conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.

NATO's largest exercise since the end of the Cold War began Tuesday as 2,000 British, Polish and American paratroopers parachuted from planes near the northern Polish town of Torun. Up to 31,000 soldiers from 24 countries will take part in the war game, dubbed Operation Anakonda 2016, together with 3,000 vehicles, 105 planes and 12 ships.

Among the participants are NATO members including the Baltic republics, Spain, Turkey, Germany, Britain, Albania, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as non-members including Finland, Macedonia, Ukraine, Georgia and Kosovo. Around 400 civilians from right-wing paramilitary groups will also be deployed. These are part of a 35,000-strong unit of volunteers mobilised by Poland under the guise of "national defence" against Russia.

According to the official plan for the operation, after an "unfortunate incident," i.e. a "misunderstanding, which the Russians interpreted as an offensive action," Russian troops march into the Baltic States and Northern Poland, to which NATO responds by massing troops in Eastern Europe.

"The Russians have something to fear," declared the conservative Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* in an article on the exercise. The most widely circulated German daily, *Bild*, wrote, "Anaconda-16: here NATO practices war with Putin." *Spiegel Online* confirmed, "One does not have to be an expert to understand the scenario. Shortly before the NATO summit, the Polish military is simulating a Russian attack on the eastern

flank of the alliance. Poland can defend itself, that is meant to be the message."

NATO has sought to portray the exercise as "defensive" and to brand Russia as the aggressor. A few days prior to the beginning of the exercise, Polish President Andrzej Duda declared at a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, "The goal of the exercise is clear. We are preparing for an attack."

US Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley declared, "The United States Army...ha[s] a single purpose in Operation Anaconda, and that is to bring all of us together to demonstrate that we are shoulder to shoulder with the Polish people, we are shoulder to shoulder with the Polish Army and we are shoulder to shoulder with NATO to ensure that all the countries of NATO remain free and independent."

This turns reality on its head. Putin's militarist posturing has nothing progressive about it, but it is the western powers, not Russia, who are the aggressor in Eastern Europe and Syria. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union twenty-five years ago, NATO, and above all the United States, have been pursuing the goal of encircling Russia and reducing it to the status of a semi-colonial client state.

At the opening ceremony for the exercise, the Ukrainian flag waved provocatively alongside those of Britain and the United States. In early 2014, Washington and Berlin, in collaboration with fascist forces, organised a coup against the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovitch. Subsequently, they utilised Russia's predominantly defensive reaction to go on the political and military offensive against Moscow.

With an eye to the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw, Stoltenberg declared at a joint press

conference last week with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen, and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Berlin that NATO was responding to the “willingness of Russia” to use violence in Crimea, and the readiness of Moscow to redraw borders in Europe with the “greatest efforts” since the end of the Cold War.

Bundeswehr Aktuell, the weekly newspaper of the German army, provided a summary of the ongoing preparations for war against Russia, declaring that the alliance is in the process of “strengthening its reactive capabilities and making them more flexible.”

The newspaper said Germany is “significantly involved and will assume a leading role in” the rapid reaction force of NATO established to target Russia at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014 as part of the NATO Response Force (NRF).

In total, the NRF will comprise up to 40,000 troops, while “in Eastern Europe, a total of eight bases known as NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) will make the deployment of forces easier.” In addition, a brigade of around 5,000 US troops are to be sent to Eastern Europe and a missile defence shield established in Poland and Romania.

Operation Anakonda-16 is only one of numerous NATO exercises currently taking place with German involvement in Eastern Europe. As part of the “Persistent Presence” military manoeuvre, an artillery battalion was transferred from Stetten, Germany to Lithuania this week. The German navy has committed nine ships in the “BALTOPS” naval exercise in the Baltic Sea, involving a total of 45 vessels, 60 aircraft and 4,000 troops from 14 nations.

In addition, the Germany army has allocated 16 vehicles, including Fennek and Fuchs tanks, to an exercise dubbed “Dragoon Ride II.” According to the German Army’s website, “German and American soldiers are on the way to Estonia. The massive march through Poland, Lithuania and Latvia stretches nearly 2,400 km and is demanding for both soldiers and material.”

Even before the beginning of the NATO summit, the US-led escalation against Russia has reached a point where even a small oversight could provoke a direct military clash. A defence expert based in Warsaw told the *Guardian* that “a mishap, a miscalculation which the Russians construe, or choose to construe, as an

offensive action,” could lead to a “nightmare scenario.”

Moscow has responded to the exercise by massing troops on its Western border, where according to the German Army, three divisions of 30,000 men are to be stationed.

Operation Anaconda “does not contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of trust and security,” declared Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov in Moscow on Tuesday. Deputy foreign minister Alexei Meshkov warned of a “further escalation on the Russian border,” and foreign minister Sergei Lavrov added, “We do not hide that we have a negative attitude toward the NATO line of moving its military infrastructure to our borders.”

Lavrov did not say it directly, but it is almost 75 years to the day that Germany commenced its horrific war against the Soviet Union that led to the most terrible crimes in human history: including the Holocaust, the killing of up to 40 million Soviet citizens and the devastation of large parts of Eastern Europe.

The German elite is well aware that its current war policy runs along similar lines. An article in *Die Welt* on the German participation in Anakonda-16 states: “German soldiers are traversing the country [Poland] from west to east for the first time since the invasion of the Nazis in Soviet-occupied Poland on 22 June 1941.”

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