

NATO Exercises Defying Coronavirus Reveal Desperation

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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The planned NATO military exercise in Europe, “Defender 2020,” will be held on a reduced scale because of the coronavirus pandemic. [Defender 2020](#) will have the participation of 18 NATO countries, cover 4,000 kilometers of convoy routes and rely on 10 European countries to host exercise activities, with the U.S. originally sending a total of 37,000 soldiers and officers to the exercises. The NATO exercises are a demonstration of power against Russia, and the fact that the coronavirus pandemic will not cancel the military drills is also indicating its power against Russia at a time when the world is going into lockdown.

[The Alliance’s official website](#) states that the scope of the exercise is shrinking due to a pandemic and that the movement of personnel and equipment from the U.S. to Europe is being halted. But many have already arrived in Europe. [Media reports quoted Manilo Dinuchi](#), an Italian journalist for Manifest, claimed soldiers were exempted from the coronavirus protocol in an exercise, something recorded in a video showing the first 200 U.S. Army soldiers arriving in Bavaria on March 6, without masks on their faces, and shaking hands and kissing with German authorities and soldiers.

So why then did this exercise have to take place at all when everything else was put off?

The goal is without a doubt to have a show of force against Russia, the main target of these massive exercises by NATO. Although this may seem like a simple reason, NATO needs to show Russia that they can organize such exercise in a demonstration of aggression even in times of uncertainty and crisis. The exercises could easily have been cancelled, because there is no reason for them to be held right now and in such conditions, but conducting them during a pandemic shows greater strength by NATO – or so they think.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg presented his Annual Report for 2019 on Thursday [and announced](#) “Our forces remain ready and our work goes on, including in our multinational battlegroups in the east of the Alliance, NATO Air Policing, our maritime deployments, and our missions from Afghanistan to Kosovo.” Although the coronavirus pandemic is plaguing NATO alliance countries, especially Italy with over 60,000 cases, the United States with over 33,000 cases, Spain with over 30,000, Germany with over 25,000 and the United Kingdom with over 6,000 cases, with thousands of deaths between these countries, Russia has only 438 confirmed cases and has been sending doctors and medical aid to Italy. As Russia weathers the pandemic comfortably compared to the major NATO countries, the Alliance feels that the cancellation of the Defender 2020 exercises will show major weakness and has therefore decided to continue with the military drills despite the non-necessity of it.

Although NATO is buckling down to continue the exercises, the grander scheme of the liberal world order is [beginning to collapse under pressure from the coronavirus](#). The European Union has shown incompetence in dealing with the pandemic and has left each country to fend for itself, and rather it has been 'enemies' of the liberal world order, China, Russia and Cuba, who have mobilized to help countries severely affected. It is unlikely that Italy and Spain, both NATO and European Union members, will quickly forget the significant help they have received from Russia. This soft power play by Russia is likely to change public opinion in Italy and Spain and create deeper divisions in NATO in regards to hostile policies against Russia. As the Atlanticist states of the United Kingdom and the United States want to maintain hostility towards Russia, it is likely that southern European NATO members will not want to continue hostilities, remembering who was there to help them in their greatest crisis since World War Two.

It is for this very reason that some NATO members may begin turning against Alliance orders with Atlanticist interests and open friendlier relations with Russia. Meanwhile coronavirus is far from peaking in Europe and is only beginning to strangle the United States. It cannot be overlooked that the virus is changing the world order at a faster pace than anyone could have anticipated. When the world has moved on and overcome the coronavirus pandemic, we will have entered a new world order and shifting European loyalties from the United States to greater cooperation with Russia and China. Therefore, the continuation of Defender 2020 shows desperation to maintain the global status quo.

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Paul Antonopoulos is a Research Fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies.

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