

NATO Reveals Plan for Deploying 4,000 Troops on Russia's Borders

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Plans to deploy some 4,000 NATO combat troops in countries bordering Russia were reported Thursday amid escalating tensions between Washington and Moscow over conflicting US and Russian military interventions in Syria.

The deployment would represent a qualitative escalation of the US-led alliance's encirclement and military buildup against Russia, heightening the threat of both war in Europe and a military clash between the world's two largest nuclear powers.

Adding to the provocative character of the proposed deployment, the troops, drawn from various NATO countries, would be placed under formal NATO command, an arrangement that is put in place in the event of a NATO war against a common enemy. Such a command structure is virtually unprecedented in peacetime.

One proposal under discussion within the alliance would place troops in battalion strength—from 800 to 1,000—in Poland and the former Soviet Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. A less extensive plan would restrict the deployment to a single battalion for the region.



German Mountain Infantry training on October 26, 2015 during Operation Trident Juncture 15. Photo Credit - NATO

Washington is pushing for the more extensive deployment, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, while “German officials in particular have expressed reservations, telling the allies in private discussions that they don’t want to treat Moscow as a permanent enemy or lock it out of Europe...”

According to the *Journal*, others in the US-led alliance, presumably including Washington itself, are arguing that

“a small buildup could have the unintended consequence of making a conflict with Russia more likely if mishaps or miscalculations by Mr. Putin accidentally trigger a wider clash. To avoid that, advocates say NATO should increase other deterrence efforts, such as demonstrating its ability to move even bigger numbers of troops quickly with exercises like one currently under way in Spain and Portugal.”

The plans for permanent troop deployments on Russia’s borders have emerged in the midst of Operation Trident Juncture, the largest NATO military exercise since 2002, involving 36,000 troops, more than 140 warplanes, more than 60 ships and seven submarines.

With the launching of the second phase of the exercise last week, NATO’s Deputy Secretary-General Alexander Vershbow, who is the US ambassador to the alliance, made clear that the war games were directed at intimidating Russia.

“We are very concerned about the Russian military build-up,” said Vershbow, who was US ambassador to Russia under the George W. Bush administration. He told reporters, “The increasing concentration of forces in Kaliningrad, the Black Sea and, now, in the eastern Mediterranean does pose some additional challenges.”

“In the east, Russia has illegally annexed Crimea, continues to support the separatists in eastern Ukraine; and now appears to have entered the war in Syria firmly on the side of Assad,” he added.

The exercise, which continues until November 6, is centered on demonstrating that NATO can quickly move decisive military force beyond its borders to attack its enemies. The war games are built around a scenario of NATO defending the fictional nation of “Lakuta” against an attack by a regional adversary, “Kamon.”

“Rising political instability, ethnic tension, and persisting socio-economic challenges are climaxed by a blatant invasion of one state’s territory by another,” the official NATO scenario for the exercise reads.

It is evident that the exercise is meant to reproduce a possible evolution of conditions in the former Soviet Baltic republics, all of which are ruled by right-wing, fanatically anti-Russian governments that have imposed brutal austerity measures against the working class, discriminate against large ethnic Russian populations and glorify their citizens who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II.

In September of last year, President Barack Obama traveled to Estonia and offered an unqualified commitment under Article 5 of the NATO charter to use American troops to defend the Baltic States against the supposed threat from Russia. Calling this commitment “unwavering” and “eternal,” he stressed that he was prepared to deliver “American boots on the ground.”

Ukraine, which is not a member of NATO, has sent its military to participate in the NATO war games. The escalating confrontation between the US and Russia was triggered by the February 2014 coup that ousted the Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovych after it

rejected a proposed European Union association agreement and sought a Russian loan bailout instead. The coup was orchestrated by Washington and Berlin and spearheaded by fascist militias. The overthrow of the government was followed by a bloody civil war, with the new US-backed regime in Kiev attempting to militarily suppress ethnic Russian rebels in the east of the country.

The latest proposals for troop deployments on Russia's borders follow earlier decisions by NATO to establish a 40,000-strong "rapid reaction force" as well as small headquarters, known as NATO Force Integration Units, in Hungary, Slovakia, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. These commands, consisting of about 80 personnel each, are designed to prepare for rapid deployment of NATO troops against Russia. In addition, plans were elaborated to pre-position arms and supplies including tanks and other heavy weaponry in striking distance of Russia.

In response to the reports of the new proposals for escalation of NATO's military buildup, Moscow's ambassador to the US-led alliance, Alexander Grushko, charged that they, as well as previous measures, were in violation of agreements reached in the 1990s in which NATO pledged not to station a substantial number of combat troops on Russia's borders.

"From the political point of view these military activities are aimed at creating a new 'Iron Curtain' in Europe," Grushko said. He added, "Our security will be safeguarded in any case, and we have a variety of choices to effectively do it."

The seemingly deliberate intensification of tensions in Eastern Europe coincides with convening in Vienna of another session of talks on the Syrian crisis. Russia has carried out hundreds of airstrikes and provided other military assistance in an attempt to prop up the government of President Bashar al-Assad, even as Washington, which like Moscow claims to be fighting "terrorism," continues to support Islamist militias seeking Assad's overthrow.

The response of President Vladimir Putin's government to the US-led imperialist offensive is both reactionary and politically bankrupt. Based on Russian nationalism and the defense of the interests of the capitalist oligarchy that enriched itself from the looting of state property with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Putin's policy oscillates between the flexing of military power and seeking an accommodation with imperialism.

On Thursday, the US Navy acknowledged having sent four armed fighter jets to confront two Russian Tu-142 Bear aircraft that were flying near the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which was engaged in naval exercises near the Korean peninsula. The Russian planes were reportedly flying at 500 feet and within one mile of the US warship. Attempts by a US escort ship to hail the Russian aircraft received no response.

The potential for a military confrontation between the US and Russia, whether in Eastern Europe, Syria or elsewhere, grows daily. The dangers of a conflict spiraling into a nuclear war are becoming greater today than they were at the height of the Cold War.

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