

NATO's Aggression against Russia and the Danger of War in Europe

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Since they mounted a coup in Kiev on February 22 with the aid of oligarchs and fascists, the United States and its allies in NATO have outlined measures against Russia that are tantamount to an unofficial declaration of war. In the space of just six weeks, the NATO powers have gone from helping stage a putsch, to imposing sanctions against Russia, to the most extensive military build-up in Europe since the Cold War.

The speed of these developments testifies to the fact that the coup against the Yanukovych regime was not the unexpected catalytic event it was made out to be, but a provocation carried out for the purpose of implementing plans long in preparation.

This was made clear by last week's NATO foreign ministers summit, which set out plans for the military alliance's expansion up to Russia's borders, including extensive war games and the possible stationing of troops within neighbouring states.

Washington has led demands for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to be offered not only to Ukraine, but also the former Yugoslav republics of Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and the former Russian republic of Georgia.

In 2008, at the time of the five-day war between Russia and Georgia, President George W. Bush was forced to back off from plans to admit Georgia to NATO, in large part because the move was opposed by Germany and France. The two European powers feared it would escalate the conflict between Russia and Georgia into a direct war with Russia.

This time, however, the plan to incorporate Georgia and Ukraine is supported by the European Union as part of a drive to intensify the confrontation with Moscow. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has repeatedly referenced Article 5 of the bloc's treaty, requiring all member states to come to the aid of another member state under attack. Given the right-wing, rabidly anti-Russian character of the Georgian and Ukrainian regimes, they will be only too willing to provide such a pretext.

The MAP is to be discussed in July and the intent of the United States is that it be implemented as early as September. Military exercises are planned or are underway involving Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Poland, as well as other states in the Baltics and the Caucasus. Most provocative are two exercises agreed to take place on Ukraine's territory—Rapid Trident and Sea Breeze.

Poland has played a key role in NATO's plans, having revived previous proposals to install a US-designed multi-million-dollar "missile shield." The government has now appealed for the

stationing of a US military battalion, equivalent to 10,000 personnel, on its soil.

Discussions are underway in ruling circles in Finland and Sweden to end their official neutrality and join NATO, in what Stockholm has described as a “doctrinal shift” in defence policy.

In Orwellian fashion, this campaign of military encirclement is being justified with unsubstantiated and exaggerated claims of a build-up of Russian forces on Ukraine’s border. The purpose of this propaganda is to portray Moscow as the aggressor, even though President Barack Obama has dismissed it as a “weak,” merely “regional” power.

As in the case of Iraq, Libya and Syria, such lies are meant to legitimize a sustained programme of imperialist re-armament, particularly in Europe.

The modus vivendi between imperialism and the capitalist oligarchies that emerged a quarter century ago in China and the USSR is rapidly unraveling. Beset by crisis, the major imperialist powers are no longer prepared to reconcile themselves to the bourgeoisie in Moscow and Beijing enjoying even relative autonomy. They are demanding direct access to the vast resources and markets that exist within the borders of Russia and China and the reduction of both countries to semi-colonial status.

The inexorable logic of this reckless policy is war.

To this end, Washington is demanding that Europe’s governments, above all Germany, step up to the mark. Obama hectored NATO members in his recent speech in Brussels, declaring, “We’ve got to be willing to pay for the assets, personnel and training required to make sure we have a credible NATO force and an effective deterrent force... Everyone has to be chipping in.”

Of the major European countries, only the UK and France presently meet the NATO requirement to spend 2.0 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on the military. Since 1998, military spending has declined in every European country, with Germany’s falling by 50 percent. To reverse such cuts and allow for increases would require the elimination of vast areas of public spending, under conditions where Europe has already been subjected to six years of austerity.

The turn to militarism demands a dramatic escalation in the assault on the democratic and social rights of the working class. There is overwhelming opposition to the war plans of Washington, Berlin, London and Paris. To impose more “sacrifices” and dragoon a new generation into the armed forces will require the full coercive powers of the state.

A warning must be sounded about the open embrace of far-right and fascist forces in Ukraine by the US and the European powers. After decades in which Europe’s governments proclaimed that the continent would “never again” witness the rule of the swastika, forces that glorify Hitler’s Ukrainian accomplices are being cultivated for use against the working class.

These developments underscore the timeliness of the intervention by the Socialist Equality Parties in Britain and Germany in May’s European elections.

In their joint manifesto for the European elections, they warn: “On the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, Europe once again stands on the brink of disaster.” The

competing ambitions of the imperialist powers, the statement continues, have led to a situation in which “a tiny spark would again suffice—as in the 1914 assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo—to turn a regional conflict into a global conflagration.”

The working class must mobilize its unified, international strength to prevent the imperialist ruling classes from plunging mankind into the catastrophe of a nuclear World War III. This requires the development of a mass movement based on socialist policies against the European Union and all of its constituent governments. It means a struggle to bring an end to the capitalist profit system and its division of the world into antagonistic nation states—the source of war—and establish the United Socialist States of Europe.

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