

The Danger of Escalation in Ukraine

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Global Research, February 11, 2015

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Since last week's announcement that Washington may directly arm the pro-NATO Ukrainian regime in Kiev, the rhetoric of the US government and its European allies has become increasingly reckless and extreme. Amid all the bellicose statements, no one is stating clearly what the cost in human lives of a broader conflict over Ukraine might be, what limits it would have, or whether it could escalate into a nuclear exchange between Russia and NATO.

At the Munich Security Conference last weekend, US Senator Lindsey Graham made clear that a major war could erupt but called for Washington to arm Kiev anyway.

"I don't know how this ends if you give [the Ukrainian regime] a defensive capability. But I know this: I will feel better, because when my nation was needed to stand up to the garbage and stand for freedom, I stood for freedom. They may die. They may lose. But all I can tell you is that if somebody doesn't push back better, we're all going to lose."

Polish Parliamentary Speaker Radoslaw Sikorski proposed threatening Russia militarily until it panics and backs down. "Putin has shown us that Ukraine cannot win militarily. Now we must show him that he cannot win militarily either," he said.

A report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank argues for arming the Kiev regime, stating: "A credible US/allied commitment to bolster the Ukrainian military while tightening sanctions will help signal to Moscow that it risks a political and military catastrophe ... "

Writing in the *New York Times*, columnist Roger Cohen demanded that the US plunge billions of dollars into arming Ukraine against Russia. He wrote, "There is a language Moscow understands: antitank missiles, battlefield radars, reconnaissance drones. Bolster the Ukrainian Army with them and other arms. Change Putin's cost-benefit analysis. There are risks, but no policy is risk-free."

Either the political establishment and media are drunk on their own propaganda, and believe that they can get away with the equivalent in international diplomacy of shouting fire in a crowded movie theater, or they mean what they say. They are moving toward launching a major land war in Europe that could lead to thermonuclear war between NATO and Russia, costing billions of lives.

Whatever the intent of those making such statements, the threats are being taken very seriously by their intended targets. Yesterday, the chief of the Kremlin's security council,

Nikolai Patrushev, said that he views the NATO intervention in Ukraine as a challenge to the very existence of Russia. “The Americans are trying to draw the Russian Federation into an interstate military conflict, to achieve regime-change through the events in Ukraine and to ultimately dismember our country,” he said.

Patrushev, a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, warned that if Washington decided to arm the Kiev regime, the conflict “would escalate only further.”

The Russian regime’s fears are being fanned by leading US strategists, who have stated that their goal in arming the Kiev regime is to trap Russia in ruinous urban warfare costing millions of lives in order to humiliate Russia and break it as major power that can challenge the United States.

Speaking last year at the Wilson Center think tank, former Carter administration National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned against the emergence in Russia of “an ambitious outlook which justifies... the conclusion that Russia is a world power.” Ukraine, he believed, could

“evolve not only into an enduring problem for Russia in that respect, but represent also the permanent loss of a huge swath of territory, the greatest loss of territory suffered by Russia in the course of its imperial expansion. This may in turn eventually begin to work against this new mythology regarding Russia’s place and role in the world.”

Brzezinski added,

“It would be much better to be open about it and to say to the Ukrainians and to those who may threaten Ukraine that if Ukrainians resist, they will have weapons... And in my view, they should be weapons designed particularly to permit the Ukrainians to engage in effective urban warfare of resistance. There’s no point trying to arm the Ukrainians to take on the Russian army in the open field, thousands of tanks, an army organized for the application of overwhelming force.”

Brzezinski explained:

“If the major cities, say Kharkiv, say Kiev, were to resist and street fighting became a necessity, it would be prolonged and costly. And the fact of the matter is, and this is where the timing of this whole crisis is important, Russia is not yet ready to undertake that kind of effort. It would be too costly in blood, paralyzingly costly in finances.”

It is a basic adage of military science that war is the most unpredictable of human activities.

One can think of countless circumstances in which a plan such as that outlined by Brzezinski, which itself involves the loss of millions of lives in Ukraine’s major cities, would rapidly lead to a direct conflict between Russia and NATO forces. Russia, rather than following Brzezinski’s playbook, may decide to strike at NATO forces and satellite regimes throughout Eastern Europe, such as in the Baltics, where NATO is treaty-bound to intervene. If the fighting goes badly for NATO in these areas, where Russia has overwhelming military

superiority in conventional weapons, will NATO retaliate with nuclear weapons?

The question that arises is: What is the objective source of the ruthlessness and recklessness of the NATO powers' foreign policy? The last two governments that adopted such aggressive and suicidal policies were Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in the years before World War II. Both regimes took incredible risks, pursuing objectives that led to the destruction of tens of millions of lives. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was a mad gamble with horrific consequences.

The actions of Germany and Japan were, in the final analysis, a response to a deep systemic crisis. The fascist regimes, confronted with internal social tensions for which they had no rational solutions, staked everything on war.

There is a dangerous parallel between the recklessness of US policy and that of Hitler and Hirohito. Despite the disasters in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, the self-deluded leaders in Washington believe that all of the intractable problems confronting US capitalism can be solved with high explosives. This wild misconception—unless confronted by organized popular resistance—can lead only to catastrophe.

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