

Western Threats against Russia Increase Danger of Nuclear War

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The imperialist powers are intensifying their confrontation with Russia in the run-up to today's European Union (EU) meeting and next week's NATO summit in Wales. The escalation, which is being driven by Washington and Berlin, is increasing the danger of a military conflict between NATO and Russia that could result in a nuclear war.

The 28 NATO ambassadors came together briefly on Friday for an emergency meeting in Brussels. "We condemn in the strongest terms the fact that Russia is continuing to ignore its international obligations," said NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. "We are pushing Russia to halt its illegal military action, end its support for armed separatists, and undertake immediate and verifiable steps to deescalate this serious crisis," he declared.

In fact, the entire meeting confirmed that NATO's policy is not "deescalation," but escalation, and that in the Ukraine conflict, it is not Putin who is the aggressor, but the Western powers.

Rasmussen, along with the government heads of all of the NATO countries, conveniently overlooks the fact that Berlin and Washington triggered the crisis by organizing a coup in close collaboration with fascist forces against the pro-Russian Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich. Now they are working closely with the puppet regime they installed, led by the billionaire oligarch Petro Poroshenko, to brutally crush a separatist insurgency in Russian-speaking parts of eastern Ukraine as the first step in militarily encircling Russia and reducing it to a neo-colonial status.

Ukraine's NATO ambassador and chief of the NATO-Ukraine commission, Igor Dolgov, used Friday's meeting to demand weapons to prosecute the war in eastern Ukraine. "What we need is more aid, including military," he said.

Rasmussen went a step further, suggesting that Ukrainian membership in NATO was a possibility. "Allow me to recall the decision reached by NATO in 2008, according to which Ukraine will become a member," he stated, and added cynically, "Every country has the right to make decisions independently and without external influence."

Just prior to the meeting, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk called for Ukraine to move toward NATO membership. At a cabinet meeting, he announced that his government planned to end the country's non-aligned status and begin the process of applying for entry into NATO. He added that membership in the European Union was also a goal.

The moves toward Ukrainian membership in NATO underscore the fact that next week's NATO summit is aimed at preparing for a possible war against Russia. Rasmussen told the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* this week that the summit would strengthen NATO's provisions for collective defense, authorize a further build-up of NATO troops in Eastern Europe, and mandate an increase in the minimum level of member states' defense budgets.

"In the future, you will see a greater NATO presence in the east," he said. "Every potential aggressor must know that if they even think of attacking a NATO member, they will have to contend with soldiers not only from the affected country, but with NATO troops."

Ukrainian membership in NATO would put a direct conflict with Russia on the order of the day. According to Article Five of the NATO charter, collective defense is triggered when a member state is attacked by another country.

Rasmussen on Friday repeated the alliance's claims that thousands of Russian soldiers had intervened in Ukraine. The previous day, Brigadier General Nico Tak, head of the crisis operation center in Mons, Belgium, had shown satellite photos allegedly proving that Russia was directly intervening militarily in Ukraine.

Russia once again rejected the allegations. "This is not the first time we have heard such speculations," said Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. "But the US has never proven them with facts."

The satellite pictures were not proof, but "only computer games," he declared. He added that the Kiev government was nervous due to recent military successes by the separatists. "That's why there are claims now about a Russian invasion." He reiterated Moscow's call for an immediate ceasefire in the east of Ukraine.

Russia is desperately seeking a deal with the West, but all signs point to an escalation by Berlin and Washington. On Thursday, it was apparent that US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel had agreed in a telephone conversation on a harder line towards Russia. German government spokesman Stefan Seibert said after the discussion that the two had agreed Russia's behavior could not continue without consequences.

On Friday, the German government spoke for the first time of a Russian intervention in Ukraine. Seibert claimed that considerable evidence had emerged of the presence of Russian soldiers and weapons.

This weekend's EU emergency summit in Brussels is set to discuss further sanctions against Russia.

Germany is already leading the build-up of NATO forces in Eastern Europe. On Thursday, four German Euro Fighter jets were moved to the Ämeri airbase in Estonia. The same squadron had previously agreed to provide 100 soldiers for NATO missions.

As German soldiers were being moved into Eastern Europe, Russian President Vladimir Putin compared the actions of the Ukrainian army against cities in eastern Ukraine with the siege of Leningrad by the Nazi Wehrmacht. Putin told Interfax, "Their tactics remind me of the fascist German soldiers in the Soviet Union in the Second World War. Major cities were besieged and destroyed by deliberate fire, along with residents."

The German media, which has been churning out anti-Russian war propaganda for months, sought to dismiss Putin's statement as a "dubious historical comparison" (*Spiegel Online*). But some of their own journalists on the spot in eastern Ukraine express horror over the crimes of the Ukrainian army.

Wolfgang Bauer, a reporter for *Die Zeit*, wrote in the newspaper's latest edition of the siege of Donetsk, a city of over one million residents. Under the headline "In the midst of the battle," he said: "The Ukrainian army has been firing heavy artillery into Donetsk for days. The morning after we arrived, two men died at a tram stop in the city center. A 14-year-old boy who wanted to visit his friends, and an older mine worker. Splinters of bone and blood covered the tarmac.

"People in Donetsk are dying when they cross the street to go shopping, when they sit on the park bench, or they die while having breakfast in the kitchen. The Ukrainian army is obviously trying to hit military targets with their heavy artillery, based on the grounds of the airport in the north of the city. But they are always missing them when they shoot with their thirty-year-old cannons."

The imperialist powers are prepared not only to stoke up the devastating war in eastern Ukraine, they are utilizing the crisis which they themselves provoked to secure their geo-strategic and economic interests against nuclear-armed Russia. The enthusiastic pro-war commentary in the Western media makes clear how far they are prepared to go, and where it could lead.

The Austrian correspondent for the London-based business publications *Financial Times* and *Economist*, Eric Frey, wrote in an article in the Vienna-based *Der Standard* under the headline "The West must stop Putin:"

"Negotiations with Putin are currently pointless, because he lies in the face of every negotiating partner. He must somehow be made aware that he has miscalculated, that the West will not accept this aggression. Only then is there a possibility to talk. This will probably only take place with a further intensification of the sanctions, including the breaking off of all economic relations with Moscow, as well as direct military aid to Kiev. Weapons exports, the stationing of NATO troops in Ukraine, and even US air strikes against separatist positions and Russian supply lines: all of these options should be on the table at present."

Frey knows that his "options," which doubtless reflect plans that are being readied behind the scenes by NATO and the Western powers, could provoke a nuclear world war.

He wrote:

"It is highly risky, because Putin is not the type to back down easily. The growing war danger threatens the already weak economy in Europe, the bloodletting in eastern Ukraine will not come to an end, and the streams of refugees will grow. And at the end of this process of escalation, a confrontation between two nuclear powers threatens. Almost all major wars were the result of miscalculations, at least on one side. This could also be the outcome this time."

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