

Zelensky Opens the Way for Foreign Troops to be Permanently and Legally Based in Ukraine

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Global Research, December 27, 2021
[InfoBrics](#) 24 December 2021

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Military](#), [WMD](#)

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The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Unicameral Parliament) adopted a law that allows foreign forces on its territory to participate in multinational exercises in 2022. The decision was made at a meeting on Tuesday and was supported by 318 parliamentarians (out of the 423 seats that are occupied), far surpassing the required minimum of 226 votes.

Ukrainian **President Volodymyr Zelensky** asked the Rada to approve his decision on allowing foreign forces on Ukrainian territory to participate in military exercises in 2022. In particular, these are for the United Efforts multinational exercises, the Ukrainian-American Rapid Trident exercises, the Ukrainian-British Cossack Mace, the multinational Light Avalanche, the Ukrainian-Polish Silver Saber, the Ukrainian-American Sea Breeze, the Ukrainian-Romanian Riverine, the multinational Maple Arch exercise and the Viking multinational exercise.

According to Ukrainian legislation, the functioning of any military formation is not provided for by law and is therefore prohibited on the country’s territory. Also, the deployment of foreign military bases is not allowed in Ukraine, therefore, foreign troops are only allowed each time into the country by a special law.

The Ukrainian law change comes as Russian **President Vladimir Putin** held his 17th annual major press conference this week, where he highlighted that it is not Russia building military bases or placing missiles on the US’ border, but rather it is the US with their missiles that are “coming to our home, they’re on the doorstep of our home.” Putin also highlighted that NATO broke their 1990’s promise of not expanding the bloc eastwards towards Russia’s borders.

Even if Ukraine is not a NATO member, Kiev is certainly desperate to be accepted into the NATO Membership Action Plan and loyally enacts Washington’s interests in Eastern Europe. With this, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Second CIS Department said that in 2021, seven

joint military maneuvers between Kiev and NATO members took place on Ukrainian territory. Nine maneuvers will be carried out in 2022 and the number of military personnel participating in them will almost double compared to 2021 – to 64,000. The number of aircraft and helicopters will more than triple – to 361, and warships almost 4 times – to 256.

“The scale, territorial scope and duration of joint exercises between Ukraine and NATO countries are increasing... All exercises are linked by a single concept and have an anti-Russian orientation,” highlighted the Second CIS Department.

On Thursday, a senior US official felt the need to reiterate that the Biden administration would issue “massive sanctions” on Russia if it were to invade Ukraine, something that Moscow continually repeats that it has no plans of doing. However, even more provocatively, the official stressed the increase in defensive aid to Kiev and NATO allies in central and Eastern Europe. “We and our allies are prepared to impose severe damage to Russia’s economy, and bring about exactly what it says it does not want: more NATO capabilities, not less, and closer [geographically] to Russia, not further away.”

Effectively, the US announced that it has no plans on scaling back escalations with Russia in Eastern Europe, and rather plans to continue provocations and tensions by promising more pressure on the borders of the Eurasian Giant.

Germany’s Welt newspaper quoted an unnamed senior NATO source as saying that NATO has strengthened its Response Force’s combat readiness because of Russia’s supposed actions.

“Before the Russian military increased near the border with Ukraine, NATO responded with the first concrete military measure and increased readiness for 40,000 rapid response forces,” the source said.

In this way, Putin’s claim that it is NATO encroaching on the borders of Russia and not vice versa is shamelessly not even denied by the Biden administration and NATO, but rather is highlighted with a sense of pride. The increase in combat readiness of NATO rapid response forces and Ukraine welcoming foreign troops on its territory near Russia’s borders is part of the ongoing hybrid war against Moscow.

NATO is attempting to pressure Moscow before the upcoming scheduled Putin-Biden meeting in an attempt to influence the negotiation process between the two leaders. It is also likely that Biden will weaponize this Ukrainian law change to place more US troops right on the border with Russia to continue its campaign of pressure that aims to limit Russian influence and compete for its traditional sphere of influence.

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