

Amid Ukraine Crisis, US launches Military Escalation in Eastern Europe

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US officials signaled a broad military escalation in Eastern Europe yesterday amid the confrontation with Russia over the February 22 fascist-led putsch in Ukraine. US officials announced the deployment of additional military forces in the region as talks between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Paris ended in a stalemate.

The military moves were a continuation of the provocative stance the US has adopted following Russian moves to secure Crimea in the wake of the anti-Russian coup in Ukraine. The movement of US military forces into the region can only increase the danger of the confrontation precipitated by the US and NATO triggering a military conflict between nuclear powers.

Testifying before Congress yesterday, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said the Pentagon will boost joint training of NATO forces in Poland and step up NATO air patrols in the Baltics. He added that he would speak with his Ukrainian counterpart later that day.

US military officials said they were deploying six F-15 fighter jets and KC-135 transport planes. "This action comes at the request of our Baltic allies and further demonstrates our commitment to NATO security," a defense official said.

Turkish officials confirmed that they had given a US Navy warship permission to pass through the Bosphorus straits into the Black Sea, which borders Ukraine. While Washington reportedly has two aircraft carriers in port in Greece. Turkish officials denied reports that the ship in question was the carrier USS George H.W. Bush, claiming the carrier was too large to pass through the Bosphorus under the terms of the Montreux Convention.

One guided-missile frigate, the USS Taylor, is still in a Black Sea port in Turkey after patrolling the region during the Sochi Olympics. The military escalation came amid the failure of talks on Ukraine in Paris, where the US, Russian, German, British and French foreign ministers met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. At the meeting, Kerry pressed Lavrov to establish ties with the new regime in Kiev, calling for "direct talks between Russia and Ukraine," and for Lavrov to meet with newly-installed Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsia.

Reflecting the complete subordination of the right-wing Ukrainian regime to Washington, Deshchytsia flew to Paris from Kiev in Kerry's plane.

However, Lavrov left the Quai d'Orsay diplomatic headquarters in Paris without speaking to

Deshchytsia, in keeping with Moscow's refusal to recognize the new government.

Lavrov reportedly proposed to return to the February 21 deal between then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and the Western-backed opposition, which would have left Yanukovych as president while ceding many of his powers to the opposition. This deal was overturned by the fascist-led putsch the next morning.

After the meeting, US officials strongly denied claims by Lavrov that Moscow and the Western powers favored a European Union-brokered peace deal in Ukraine. A top State Department official told Reuters that there were "no agreements" in the Kerry-Lavrov talks and that "there never will be without direct Ukrainian government involvement and absolute buy-in."

The US escalation underscores that the support for the Independence Square (Maidan) protests by Western politicians and the February 22 coup were not a struggle for democracy, but part of a broad struggle for power and geo-strategic influence in Eurasia. Though Putin was widely seen as having backed down this week, calling off military exercises and declaring that Russia would not attack Ukraine, US imperialism is recklessly stoking up tensions.

Putin's climb-down after Monday's 10 percent drop on the Russian stock market and Lavrov's proposal for power-sharing with the far right highlight the basic weakness of the Kremlin's position. Representing narrow, corrupt elites tied to right-wing parties within Russia itself and fearful of mass discontent with its reactionary social policies, the Kremlin cannot make any progressive appeal to the working class either of Russia or Ukraine. Its military actions are bound up with the promotion of Russian nationalism, which can only increase the threat of bloody sectarian conflict and war. The Western powers are pressing ahead with further social attacks on the working class in Ukraine. With major banks refusing to lend to Ukraine, the country needs an estimated \$35 billion to refinance its debts in the coming years.

The EU promised €1.6 billion (\$2.2 billion) in emergency loans to Kiev yesterday, as well as €11 billion in loans over the next seven years. This offer followed an offer of \$1 billion in loan guarantees by Kerry when he visited Kiev on Tuesday.

The European Commission stressed that the proposed emergency funding would be available only if Ukraine made a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which will demand deep social cuts in the already impoverished country. Austerity measures being considered include pension cuts and the elimination of subsidies for natural gas, which will drastically increase home heating costs for working class families.

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