

White House Threatens Russia Over Alleged Incursion Into Eastern Ukraine

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The Obama administration and NATO officials on Thursday escalated threats against Russia over the alleged incursion of two columns of Russian tanks and troops into eastern Ukraine. Moscow has denied accusations that its troops are actively involved in the country.

In an afternoon press conference, US President Barack Obama declared that Russian actions were further confirmation that Moscow was fomenting the unrest and has “routinely violated the territorial integrity of Ukraine.” While he refrained from characterizing Russia’s actions as an invasion, he said that it was a “continuation” of the sort of Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine that has been occurring for the last several weeks.

“These separatists are backed, trained, armed, financed by Russia,” Obama declared. “Throughout this process we’ve seen deep Russian involvement in everything that they’ve done.” The US president pledged “additional steps” to punish Moscow for supporting the separatists, including new economic sanctions coordinated with Europe.

In fact, it was not Russia that stoked the conflict in Ukraine but rather the United States, along with Germany, which funneled billions of dollars to opposition groups, backing a right-wing coup in February with the support of fascist forces. The White House is strongly backing the Ukrainian government of President Petro Poroshenko as it carries out a brutal war against predominantly Russian-speaking cities in the east.

More than 2,249 people have been killed and more than 6,000 injured in military operations in the Donbass region of Ukraine. The American government has supported the military siege of two major European cities, Donetsk and Luhansk, cutting off electricity and running water to hundreds of thousands of civilians. Residential neighborhoods and hospitals have been subjected to artillery fire from Ukrainian armed forces.

The shelling of the eastern cities of Donetsk by Ukrainian forces continued on Thursday, injuring 15 people and destroying several homes and businesses. Over the course of the previous day, 16 civilians were killed and a further 22 injured by continued shelling.

The latest developments in eastern Ukraine have opened up a new front in the conflict in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian armed forces and further raised the possibility of war between the United States and Russia.

While stating that “we are not taking military action to solve the Ukrainian problem,” Obama provocatively declared that “a number of those states who are close” to Ukraine and Russia are members of NATO, “and we take our Article Five commitments to defend each other

very seriously—and that includes the smallest NATO members as well as the largest.”

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many former Warsaw Pact countries in Eastern Europe joined NATO, including Poland and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Since the coup in February, the US and NATO have moved to increase their military presence in all these countries. Article Five of the treaty states that an armed attack on any NATO country is considered an attack on all members.

As a means of justifying a further military buildup of NATO forces in Eastern Europe and the imposition of ever more harsh economic sanctions, the United States and its European allies have very consciously sought, at every point, to force Russia to respond.

The United States is seeking to turn Ukraine into a NATO outpost for threatening Russia. This is highlighted by the fact that Poroshenko will be the only non-NATO head of state attending the NATO summit in Wales next week. Poroshenko is also scheduled to meet with President Obama at the White House next month.

These military moves have been coupled with the implementation of harsh austerity measures in Ukraine itself, targeting the entire working class.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin called Thursday for pro-Russian separatists to open up a corridor to allow Ukrainian troops to flee into Russia. Putin called on the rebels to, “avoid meaningless victims and provide them with the opportunity to freely withdraw from the battlefield area.” At least five Ukrainian National Guard battalions were reported to have been surrounded since Tuesday, when pro-Russian separatists engaged in a fierce battle to retake the town of Ilovaisk.

NATO released satellite images that it claims shows Russian artillery and other equipment well inside Ukrainian territory. A senior NATO officer, Brigadier General Nico Tak, stated that the images, “provide additional evidence that Russian combat soldiers, equipped with heavy weapons, are operating inside Ukraine’s sovereign territory.”

One image purportedly shows Russian self-propelled artillery moving on a road near Krasnodon, Ukraine on August 21 just across the border from the Russian city of Donetsk. Another image shows the same artillery set up in firing positions outside of Krasnodon, while the several other images released by NATO show artillery and military units deployed on the Russian side of the border.

Tak also said that NATO had evidence that more than 1,000 Russian soldiers were fighting with the rebels in Ukraine. Aleksandr Zakharchenko, the head of the Donetsk People’s Republic, said on Thursday that between three and four thousand Russian volunteers are fighting alongside the Ukrainian separatists, and that many of these were military men on leave. He stated, “There is no secret that among the volunteers from Russia there are many military men. They are fighting together with us because they understand that it’s their duty.”

Poroshenko responded to the developments in the east by canceling a scheduled trip to Turkey. “The situation is certainly extremely difficult and nobody is going to simplify it. Still, it is controlled enough for us to refrain from panic,” Poroshenko said.

Ukrainian security council spokesman Andriy Lysenko accused Moscow of sending troops and tanks across the border in a bid to create a land bridge to the territory of Crimea, which

Russia annexed in March. Lysenko also announced that the security council had made a decision to reintroduce compulsory military service starting in the fall.

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