

WAR DRIVE AGAINST RUSSIA

British and Obama Will Deploy Military to Ukraine

by Jeffrey Steinberg

March 23—After weeks of back-and-forth delays, the Pentagon announced on March 19 that American military personnel would be going to Ukraine by late April to train the Ukrainian armed forces. The mission, involving 300-600 paratroopers from the Vicenza, Italy-based 173rd Airborne Brigade, according to the Feb. 12 Pentagon announcement, is to train National Guard forces (which are infested, if not dominated, by Nazi militias), how to better defend themselves against “Russian and rebel artillery and rockets.” It had been put on hold to await the outcome of the Minsk ceasefire agreements.

An initial contingent of British Army trainers is already in western Ukraine on a similar mission. The decision by President Obama marks a victory for Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and other administration neocons, who have been pushing for confrontation with Russia.

That slide towards confrontation will not abate until both Nuland and President Obama are removed from office. So long as the British war party maintains control over the U.S. nuclear button, the danger will remain—despite the best intentions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other war-avoidance forces in Washington and Europe.

The recent interventions by leading German figures, including Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, have been an important pushback, but the current escalation against

Moscow, centered on Ukraine and the Baltics, is a clear reminder that the drive for war is very real.

Deployment Against Minsk

Gen. Ben Hodges, head of the U.S. Army in Europe, defended the decision, claiming that it did not mean that the U.S. had concluded that the Minsk Accords reached in February had failed. The Minsk agreements did suffer a serious setback last week, but not through any actions from Moscow.

Just hours before the deadline, Ukraine’s Poroshenko/Yatsenyuk government submitted a bill to the Supreme Rada (parliament), that was to provide for greater autonomy for the eastern Ukrainian regions, as mandated by the Minsk Accords. But the bill’s language contained a “poison pill,” demanding that the introduction of the new status be postponed until the Donetsk and Lugansk regions hold elections under Ukrainian jurisdiction. In effect, Kiev refuses to recognize or talk with the two republics.

That action plainly violated the Minsk Accords. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Rossiya 1 state TV March 21 that it was now up to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande to “save Minsk.” He warned that “provocateurs in Kiev” could now stage an incident to blow up the ceasefire and create the circumstances for a flow of arms to the Ukrainian forces. Lavrov confirmed that the Normandy Four (Russia, Germany, France, Ukraine)

will be meeting in Paris in the coming week, and that the meeting could be elevated to a ministerial level, if the crisis required it.

Signs of Confrontation

The fact that NATO and American Administration actions are driving the situation toward confrontation was highlighted March 21 by Russia's Ambassador to Denmark, Mikhail Vanin, who warned in an op-ed that if Denmark went ahead with plans to participate in the U.S.-NATO missile defense program, Russian strategic nuclear weapons would be targeted against the Danish Navy. He said the planned missile defense deployments posed a "threat to Russia" by disrupting the fragile nuclear balance in Europe.

The British media continues to hype the war danger—blaming Russia. The *Mail on Sunday* March 22 warned that Russia's new generation supersonic Tu-160 bombers outclassed the British defenses and posed a dire threat to the U.K.

Russia has been conducting "snap maneuvers" in the west of the country, testing readiness for a full-scale conflict with NATO. The maneuvers involve the deployment of nuclear weapons-armed submarines and the forward positioning of some of Russia's mobile strategic forces. At the same time, Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Anatoli Antonov said that his boss, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, would welcome a call from U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who, during testimony at a March 18 hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, insisted that Ukraine primarily needed economic aid, and reminded Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry a number of times that Ukraine was *not* a member of NATO.

The Russian military conducted a tour of its National Defense Center March 21, to which the defense attachés of foreign embassies in Moscow, including those of NATO countries, were invited, for the first time ever. This came on the concluding day of Russia's six-day military maneuvers, which involved the Northern Fleet/Arctic Fleet command, as well as airborne forces and several other military districts. The Northern Fleet is the strategic fleet of the Russian Navy, with the largest number of submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

The exercise involved the deployment of Iskander nuclear-capable missiles to Kaliningrad, the far western Russian enclave, formerly in East Prussia; of TU-22M long-range, nuclear-capable Backfire bombers to Crimea; and of 76,000 military personnel, 41 ships, 15 submarines, including forward-deployed nu-

clear submarines, and 110 warplanes and combat helicopters.

Antonov briefed those who toured the National Defense Center, and showed film footage of the completed exercise. According to China's Xinhua news agency, Antonov's remarks about the exercise left an unmistakable impression: "Moscow only acted in a defensive way to ensure its national security. We are not seeking confrontation with NATO. We would like our cooperation to develop." He noted that NATO planes are constantly flying along Russia's borders, while Russia has refrained from responding with the kind of "hysteria" with which the West has greeted this week's Russian maneuvers.

Andrei Kartapolov, deputy chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, said, according to Xinhua, that Russia will continue to hold surprise drills; Antonov said that foreign representatives will continue to be invited to them. "We want to cooperate and live in peace," Antonov stated, and urged the foreign attachés to submit honest reports, and not portray the Russians as "monsters."

NATO Creating 'Tripwire'

The Ukraine Supreme Rada recently passed legislation providing for five NATO maneuvers in Ukraine during 2015, including three U.S.-led maneuvers.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also announced last week that he was prepared to accept a Ukraine application to join the Alliance. His announcement was followed by a call from Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO Supreme Commander, for the arming of Ukraine, even though Breedlove acknowledged that such action could escalate the crisis with Russia.

General Hodges also announced that the U.S. would be pre-positioning a large stockpile of military equipment in the Baltic States and Poland, including 220 Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles. This puts in place a "tripwire" for direct confrontation with Russia. The pre-positioning of military equipment also involved the deployment of small contingents of American troops, to secure and maintain the equipment.

The Russian Foreign Ministry charged that the actions announced by Hodges were in violation of the Russia-NATO Founding Act, which placed clear limits on any permanent basing of NATO hardware in newly admitted NATO members in the east. The Foreign Ministry statement expressed hope that European leaders would reject the actions by the American generals and avoid "the risk of a slide towards military confrontation between Russia and NATO."