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NATO Wales Summit Heightens Tensions Pouring More Fuel on Fire (I)

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The NATO September 4-5 summit in Wales attended by heads of government, another 180 VIPs, and 4,000 delegates and officials leaders and senior ministers from around 60 other countries is over as the Alliance draws down from its longest ever mission in Afghanistan and against a backdrop of instability in Ukraine. Initially convened as a largely ceremonial event to mark the end of international involvement in Afghanistan, the forum addressed a host of security issues with key topics including the relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine, the escalating Islamic State crisis across Iraq and Syria, the threat posed by foreign fighters returning from the

Middle East conflicts.

A string of military exercises created the background the summit took place against.

U.S. Exercise *Saber Junction* in transition phase to a large-scale, multinational NATO military exercise called *Steadfast Javelin II*, kicked off on Tuesday September 2 to last till September 8. This portion of the exercise involves hundreds of vehicles, aircraft and soldiers from 9 different nations. The training event takes place across 5 NATO countries: Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The *Steadfast Javelin II* phase will be led by NATO's Allied Land Command (LANDCOM) and will facilitate the training of more than more than 2,000 multinational soldiers in unified land operations and interoperability. Multinational participants in the over-arching *Saber Junction* include the following NATO allies: Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and the United States; and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) nations: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

With about 600 Czech and 300 foreign soldiers NATO launched Ample Strike 2014 military exercise on September 3. The participants are using about 30 helicopters and aircraft at the bases in central and south Bohemia. The drill includes soldiers from 10 other NATO members: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and the United States. It will last till September 15.

One more training event is to take place in Latvia by the end of this month, bringing the host country's military together with a thousand strong force made up by US, UK and Estonia military.

Rapid Trident, a multinational force training event (formally not a NATO only drill) is planned for mid-September as an anti-Russia muscle flexing demonstration to take place near the Polish border with participation of 1000 military (200 from the US) from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, Latvia, Lithuania, the UK, Canada, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain.

At least four NATO ships patrol Black Sea waters.

Visiting Estonia before flying to Wales President Obama announced plans to send Air Force units and aircraft to the Baltic republics as part of an effort to reassure the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania of their security as NATO members in the wake of the ongoing unrest in Ukraine. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Estonia's president, Obama called Estonia's Amari Air Base an ideal location to base those additional forces, which come as NATO nations prepare to bolster a rapid-response force for the region.

The rising tensions accompanied the summit taking decisions to pour even more fuel on fire.

Russia is not watching the events idly. Its strategic nuclear forces will conduct major exercises this month involving more than 4,000 soldiers, the Defense Ministry said on September 3. The drill will take place take place in Altai in south-central Russia to include around 400 technical units and extensive use of air power. The troops will practice countering irregular units and high-

precision weapons, and "conducting combat missions in conditions of active radio-electronic jamming and intensive enemy actions in areas of troop deployment."

One more element of the event's background was hundreds of campaigners who descended on Newport, South Wales, to protest against the top level meeting. A coalition of protest groups, including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, No to NATO, Stop the War and South Wales Anti-Nuclear, demanded nuclear disarmament and an end to imperialist Western foreign policy.

With truce achieved in Minsk on Sept.5, the leaders of states with NATO-EU membership approved the idea of imposing further sanctions against Russia if hostilities continue in Ukraine; no matter Russia is **not a party** to the conflict. Secretary General Anders Rasmussen said weapons supplies to Ukraine are a decision to be taken individually by the members. NATO is expected to set up new trust funds to help Ukraine better defend itself. The assistance is expected to come in the form of logistics, from fuel to spare parts; defense against cyberwarfare; improving intelligence, command and control; and importantly, help for veterans' payments. At that the Alliance has made it clear that it does not intend to become involved militarily in Ukraine and scheduled a symbolic meeting at the summit with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

Besides looking for new ways to punish Russia, the organization also tackled the problem of forces repositioning and pledging more money for military spending and recommitting to collective defense. In 2006 all member countries pledged to spend 2% of their GDP on defence. In Europe only Britain, France, Greece and Estonia met that benchmark last year (although Poland is getting there).

There was no definite decision of Afghanistan as the impasse over the runoff vote has prevented the inauguration of a new head of state. Outgoing President Karzai has refused to sign a bilateral security agreement that would set the terms for nearly 10,000 American troops to remain in Afghanistan into next year, mostly as advisers and trainers. A similar agreement with NATO has been held up because of its dependence on the American presence. If there isn't a legal basis for NATO's continued presence in Afghanistan, it will have to withdraw everything by the end of the year.