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## Military officials declare Russia the “greatest threat” to US interests

By Niles Williamson

10 July 2015

The Obama administration’s nominee to take over as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that Russia “presents the greatest threat to our national security” in a confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday.

General Joseph F. Dunford pointed to Russia’s nuclear arsenal as a serious threat to US interests. “If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I’d have to point to Russia,” Dunford stated. “If you look at their behavior, it’s nothing short of alarming.”

Dunford’s remarks echoed those of US Air Force Secretary Deborah James, who declared the day before that Russia presented the “biggest threat” to the United States’ security. She also called on all NATO members to boost their military spending to two percent of GDP as means of countering Russia.

James told Reuters that the United States was increasing its military presence in Eastern Europe in response to Russia’s “worrisome” activity. “This is no time to in any way signal a lack of resolve in the face of these Russian actions,” James said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov responded to James’ remarks Thursday, accusing her of creating an “an artificial atmosphere of hostility.”

The efforts by top US military officials to present US actions in Europe as a response to Russian aggression turns reality on its head. American imperialism has been steadily increasing its military incursions in Eastern Europe aimed at encircling Russia, a process that was vastly accelerated following the US-backed right-wing coup in Ukraine last year.

The latest remarks by leading members of the US armed forces make clear that the Obama administration's campaign of military pressure against Russia is increasingly fraught with the danger of war between the world's two largest nuclear armed powers. The 2015 National Military Strategy, released by the Pentagon last week, identified Russia along with China, North Korea and Iran as possible targets for American military action.

Last month US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that the military would deploy heavy artillery, tanks and other military equipment on a rotating basis throughout Eastern Europe.

According to recent reports, NATO is also discussing modifying the conditions under which it could use nuclear weapons against Russia.

NATO also announced last month that it is tripling the size of its Response Force to 40,000 and has begun training exercises with the recently formed Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a contingent of 5,000 soldiers designed to mobilize against Russia in a matter of days. NATO is also opening six new command centers in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania.

Earlier this year the Obama administration announced that it was considering providing the Western-backed regime in Kiev with lethal military equipment to assist in its effort to crush the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Republican Senator John McCain, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, has repeatedly pressed for openly arming the Ukrainian regime.

Under friendly questioning from McCain on Thursday, Dunford made clear his support for the delivery of counter-battery systems and Javelin or Tow anti-tank missiles to the Ukrainian regime. "From a military perspective I think it is reasonable that we provide that support to the Ukrainians. Frankly without that kind of support they are not going to be able to protect themselves against Russian aggression," Dunford stated.

The Obama administration has already provided the government of President Petro Poroshenko with Humvees, body armor and first-aid supplies. In addition to sending vehicles and equipment, approximately 300 American paratroopers are currently deployed in western Ukraine to train members of the Ukrainian National Guard. The National Guard has incorporated members of the fascist Azov Battalion and other far-right paramilitary groups that have committed numerous atrocities as part of military operations in the east.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Thursday that the Obama administration is preparing to expand the training operation to include members of the Ukrainian Army as well as Special Forces. During a recent visit to the training base west of Lviv, Army Chief of Staff General Ray

Odierno gave his support to Ukrainian plans to expand the capabilities of the base to train larger units.

Odierno made clear that the training program was also playing an important role in preparing US soldiers for the possibility of having to fight against Russian troops. “This training is shared training,” Odierno said. “It is American forces training Ukrainian forces, and it’s Ukrainian forces training American forces.”