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## US and NATO engage in unprecedented military exercises in Europe

By Niles Williamson

24 July 2015

The United States and its European and NATO allies are currently engaged in or preparing to undertake the largest military exercises ever to take place in the host countries involved. These operations include the deployment of American and NATO soldiers and heavy military equipment across the breadth of the European continent, with a focus on Russia's western border.

Annual military exercises in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine have grown significantly in size and scope in the wake of the 2014 coup in Ukraine and ensuing civil war. The United States and its allies have used claims of Russian aggression in Ukraine to ramp up its military presence throughout Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries.

The United States announced last month that it will station heavy equipment, including artillery and tanks, on a rotating basis in a number of Eastern European NATO countries. Additionally, NATO announced that it would triple the size of its Response Force which is aimed at Russia.

In addition to ongoing exercises in Eastern Europe, Trident Juncture 2015, the largest NATO military exercise since 2002, is scheduled to begin in late September and will involve 36,000 troops from more than 30 countries. The exercises will take place in Spain, Italy and Portugal, with all 28 NATO countries plus five allies participating.

In a scenario that clearly stands in for the ongoing Ukraine conflict, forces from the participating countries' armies, navies, air forces and Special Forces will engage in an extended operation to assist the fictitious country of Sorotan, a non-NATO country that is wracked by internal armed conflict and faces a military threat from a powerful neighbor.

A review of the ongoing exercises in the run-up to Trident Juncture gives a sense of the size and scope of the war preparations being developed by the United States and its NATO allies.

## **Ukraine**

The Saber Guardian/Rapid Trident 2015 joint exercise opened on Monday near Lviv in far western Ukraine. Approximately 2,000 soldiers from 18 countries including the United States, the UK, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania and Ukraine are taking part. Training activities include small arms fire, the deployment and use of armored vehicles, responding to an ambush, and identifying and dismantling improvised explosive devices.

The Saber Guardian exercise, which rotates between host nations, was integrated with Rapid Trident, held annually in Ukraine. Due to this integration, the exercise, which ends on July 31, is being billed as the largest multinational military exercise to take place in Ukraine since joint maneuvers with US and western European forces began in 1995.

The Russian foreign ministry put out a statement on Monday warning that the exercises had the potential to undermine the ceasefire between Kiev and pro-Russian separatists signed in February. "NATO not only is not ready to admit that the organization of such drills is a mistake [and] have possibly explosive consequences but [has] considerably increased their scale and the number of personnel involved as compared with the last year's exercises," the foreign ministry said.

Don Wrenn, public affairs specialist for the United States Army in Europe, absurdly denied that the exercises were in any way directed against Russia or the pro-Russian separatists in the east. "It is not anything to do with the political situation," Wrenn told reporters. "This exercise was planned ahead of time. Countries were notified that it would occur and we can't directly connect with the situation going on. Rapid Trident has been going for years in Ukraine."

The United States has been providing military support to the pro-Western government that came to power in a fascist-spearheaded coup. The US and its European allies backed the coup as part of its long-term strategy of removing Ukraine from Russia's historic sphere of economic and military influence, with the ultimate aim of encircling and transforming Russia into a semi-colony.

Over the last year the Obama administration has delivered Humvees, body armor and medical aid kits to bolster the Ukrainian army. While it so far has not heeded calls to provide Kiev with lethal weaponry, such as shoulder fired anti-tank missiles, the Obama administration is reportedly close to making a decision on the delivery of long range radar to assist in the fight against the pro-Russian separatists.

In addition to the supply of military aid, US paratroopers have been training members of the recently formed Ukrainian National Guard. The National Guard has incorporated members of the fascist paramilitary organizations such as the Azov Battalion, which has been at the forefront of the offensive against pro-Russian separatists in the east. The Obama administration is preparing to expand this training operation to incorporate members of the Ukrainian military.

## **Moldova**

The Joint Effort 2015 exercise is being held at a military base near Balti, the second largest city in Moldova. The military drills which started on Monday and go through Saturday involve approximately 800 troops from the United States, Romania, Poland, Georgia and Moldova.

The current operation is amongst the largest military maneuvers ever undertaken in the country, located between Ukraine and Romania. Prior to the opening of Joint Effort exercises, US troops trained Moldovan soldiers in the use of new communications systems.

The US and its European allies have been actively working to counter Russian influence in the small land-locked country. While not a member of the NATO alliance, Moldova is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and has markedly increased military cooperation with NATO since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine last year.

A former Soviet Republic, Moldova contains the disputed territory of Transnistria. Russia has had peacekeepers stationed in the territory since 1992 as part of a cease-fire agreement in the Transnistrian War, which broke out in 1990 amidst the dissolution of the USSR.

## **Georgia**

Two weeks of military exercises in Georgia known as Agile Spirit 2015 concluded on Wednesday. Held at Vaziani Military Base outside the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, the exercises were an expansion of bilateral US-Georgia drills, including for the first time a number of forces from NATO countries. Approximately 700 soldiers from the US, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Georgia practiced urban warfare, moving house to house and undertaking medical evacuations.

US Marine Captain Frank Walker laid out the purpose of the exercises in a NATO promotional video posted on YouTube. "What we're doing here is practicing conventional offence and defense operations," he said. "And what that allows us to do is rapidly transition away from the counterinsurgency requirements of Iraq and now Afghanistan and go back to more of a general purpose infantry force that can respond to regional crisis."

While Georgia is not yet an official member of the NATO alliance, a new NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation center is slated to open in August. The US has been pressing to incorporate the former Soviet republic into the NATO alliance. With US backing, Georgia fought a brief war with Russia in 2008 over the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

