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Alex Lantier

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Despite Putin's nuclear warning, NATO escalates campaign to allow strikes deep inside Russia

After Russian President Vladimir Putin changed Russia's nuclear doctrine so as to allow for Russian nuclear strikes in retaliation for NATO strikes on Russia launched from Ukraine, NATO officials have reiterated threats to launch long-range missile strikes at targets across Russia. They are making clear that NATO is determined to launch bombing raids deep inside Russia, even if this provokes the Kremlin to use nuclear weapons.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, left, is watched by Rich Hansen, the commander's representative for the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant, while signing military ordnance in Scranton, Pennsylvania Sunday, Sept. 22, 2024. [AP Photo/Office of the Ukrainian Presidency]

At the US Council on Foreign Relations yesterday, outgoing NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called for giving nuclear-capable F-16 jets and long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine. He insisted that NATO member countries are ready to use these weapons to bomb targets “very deep” inside Russian territory.

He said:

All of these weapons are advanced weapons, and some Allies have no restrictions on the use of these weapons against legitimate military targets on the territory of Russia. Other Allies have had restrictions, but most of them actually loosened those restrictions. ... I understand the difference between deep and deeper, and very deep into Russian territory, but fundamentally, we have crossed those lines many times already, because we cannot accept that Russia is trying to get control over Ukraine and prevent us from supporting Ukraine by using all these different threats.

The NATO alliance is effectively declaring that it is willing to risk nuclear war. While Stoltenberg absurdly claimed that “deterrence is there to prevent war,” in fact, his comments show precisely the opposite. Even the threat of Russia’s vast nuclear arsenal is insufficient to deter NATO, which has already bombed civilian residential areas of Russian cities and military bases, from pledging to carry out a massive bombing campaign against Russia.

The NATO alliance, Stoltenberg continued, is waging a global conflict, including with countries in Asia and the Middle East whom he denounced as “enablers” of Russia’s war in Ukraine. He denounced North Korean deliveries of artillery shells, Iranian delivery of drones and Chinese delivery of key industrial components to Russia.

Stoltenberg particularly denounced China, the world’s second-largest economy. He said:

We see them in Africa. We see them in the Arctic. ... The microelectronics, the components which are used to build the bombs and the missiles that Russia is using against Ukraine every day are based on deliveries from China. So, then to say that this is a regional thing, no, it’s not a regional thing, because the main enablers of Russia’s war are from outside Europe: North Korea, Iran and China.

NATO officials’ arguments that “deterrence is there,” or that they know the Kremlin is bluffing and will not risk attacking NATO targets are conscious lies. By massively escalating the bombing of Russia, they are goading the Kremlin into drastic retaliation, quite likely involving the use of nuclear weapons. The question that is posed is what interests are driving this monumentally reckless strategy, which risks provoking a nuclear war that, if it escalates, could destroy all of humanity.

Currently, the NATO-backed Ukrainian army faces a defeat which, as Stoltenberg’s remarks make clear, is unacceptable to the main NATO imperialist powers. They see that direct NATO intervention is necessary if Russia is to be militarily defeated. However, this faces overwhelming opposition in the working class: Fully 91 percent of North Americans and 89 percent of West Europeans oppose sending troops to Ukraine, as proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron.

It is apparent that, despite bitter factional battles in the ruling class, powerful factions of the bourgeoisie in the NATO countries aim to provoke Russian retaliation, manifestly hoping the political shock at home will create more favorable conditions for launching a Europe-wide war against Russia.

It is well known in official circles that the ludicrous arguments like Stoltenberg's, that NATO can bomb Russia without provoking a war, are a pack of lies. Yesterday, the *New York Times* reported that US intelligence agencies are warning that NATO missile strikes on Russia will provoke Russian strikes on NATO targets.

“U.S. intelligence agencies believe that Russia is likely to retaliate with greater force against the United States and its coalition partners, possibly with lethal attacks, if they agree to give the Ukrainians permission to employ U.S., British and French-supplied long-range missiles for strikes deep inside Russia,” the *Times* wrote. It said Russia's response might range from “sabotage targeting facilities in Europe, to potentially lethal attacks on US and European military bases.”

And yesterday, Putin's main remaining ally in Europe, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, recklessly pledged to respond to a US-Polish attack into Belarusia with nuclear weapons. “As soon as they attack us, we use nuclear weapons. Russia will defend us,” he said at a public meeting in Minsk, adding: “If we use nuclear weapons, they will do the same. And against Russia too. So Russia will use the entire arsenal of weapons. This will be a world war. ... We tell them openly: the red line is the state border. You step on it, we will respond immediately.”

The military concerns driving Russian and Belarusian officials to threaten the use of nuclear weapons in response to NATO strikes on Russia are emerging more clearly. It is evident that last week's NATO-Ukrainian bombing of the major Russian ammunition dump at Toropets has substantially weakened the Russian army. Even if it retained superiority over the Ukrainian army, which has been bled white by nearly three years of war, it would still now be in a far weaker position facing NATO.

Yesterday, the deputy commander of Estonian military intelligence, Lt. Colonel Janek Kesselman, delivered a report on the bombing at Toropets. He said, “Since the Russian Federation has lost a significant amount of ammunition intended for the front, it will likely have to prioritise its actions in the coming months.”

Earlier, Estonian military intelligence chief Colonel Kiviselg had given specific details on the Russian ammunition losses in the Toropets attack: “30,000 tonnes of explosive ordnance were detonated, which means 750,000 shells. If we take the average battle rate, the Russian

Federation has fired 10,000 rounds a week. So that's two to three months' supply of ammunition. As a result of this attack, Russia has suffered losses in ammunition and we will see the impact of these losses on the front in the coming weeks."

Yesterday, Kesselman reported that the number of Russian offensives in Ukraine had fallen drastically, from 226 per day last week to 155 per day this week. However, he added that the full effect of the bombing of Toropets would likely "be felt in two to three weeks," as forward-deployed stocks of Russian ammunition are depleted.

This exposes the recklessness of the NATO imperialist powers, who play the main role in escalating the conflict, and the bankruptcy of the post-Soviet capitalist regimes in Russia and Belarussia. Incapable of making any appeal to mass anti-war sentiment in the international working class, and with their armies outnumbered by the combined troops of the NATO powers, they are reduced to threatening nuclear Armageddon. Even this, however, is not sufficient to deter the NATO powers from continuing the escalation.

The urgent question posed by these developments is the construction of an international anti-war movement in the working class, to halt capitalism's accelerating plunge into a Third World War.