

US sends two warships into the Black Sea as Russia warns of “full-scale hostilities” with NATO-backed Ukraine

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The US is sending two warships to the Black Sea amid a rapidly escalating crisis in East Ukraine. On Friday, the Turkish government confirmed that the Pentagon had issued a formal request 15 days ago that two of its warships be allowed to pass through Turkish straits, to be deployed in the Black Sea until May 4.

The sending of US warships to the Black Sea is the latest in a series of extraordinarily provocative moves by NATO-backed Ukraine and the US in the crisis. In March, shortly after Joe Biden took office and reaffirmed that “Crimea is Ukraine,” the Ukrainian government of Volodymyr Zelensky announced a strategy to “recover Crimea” and the Donbas.

The Crimea, a highly strategic peninsula in the Black Sea, was annexed by Russia in 2014 following a US- and German-backed coup in Kiev. The Donbas has been the site of an ongoing civil war for almost seven years, and is controlled largely by Russian-backed separatists. The announcement of an offensive to retake these territories was tantamount to declaring that Ukraine is preparing for war.

This was the immediate backdrop for the growing fighting between the separatists and the Ukrainian army. Zelensky has since urged NATO to accelerate the admission of Ukraine to the military alliance, and Ukraine and NATO have announced joint military exercises. Last Friday, Zelensky met virtually with US President Biden, who assured him of full US support against Russia. In response to these provocations, Russia has amassed troops on the borders to Ukraine, announced military exercises and is reinforcing its navy in the Black Sea.

Like the US, Germany and France have denounced “Russian aggression.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel called upon Putin on Thursday to withdraw troops from the border of East Ukraine. Zelensky is set to travel to Paris next week to meet for negotiations with French President Emmanuel Macron. The French government has also demanded on that Russia “explain” the troop movements in the region.

On Thursday, Zelensky traveled to visit the Ukrainian troops in East Ukraine on Thursday, whom he praised for being “a true example of heroism and dedication.” A significant number of the troops and militias still fighting in what is a deeply unpopular war in Ukraine are affiliated with the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion and similar far-right formations, which have been systematically built up by the Ukrainian state and the US, especially since the 2014 coup.

In speaking of “Russian aggression,” the imperialist powers, Kiev and their lackeys in the media are turning reality on its head. It is Ukraine, backed by NATO and the US, not Russia, that has been systematically escalating the situation and pushing the region to the brink of all-out war.

On Friday, the spokesman of the Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, said Russia was taking precautions given the “dangerous, explosive region at its borders.” He warned that the situation was so unstable that “the dynamics created the danger of a resumption of full-scale hostilities.” In a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine of resuming “dangerous provocative actions.” A day before, the deputy head of Russia’s presidential administration, Dmitry Korzak, said that Russian forces could intervene to defend Russian citizens in the region. The Kremlin has also offered Russian passports to residents of the Donbas and all Ukrainians who wanted one. He stated that a war could mark the “beginning of the end” of Ukraine.

Writing for the right-wing think tank publication *National Interest*, Ted Galen Carpenter noted that the situation now was reminiscent of the lead-up to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, when the US deliberately encouraged Georgia to take aggressive action against Russia. He wrote, “The parallels between Washington’s excessive encouragement of Ukraine and Bush’s blunder with respect to Georgia [in 2008] are eerie and alarming. Vladimir Putin’s government has given the West numerous warnings over the years that attempting to make Ukraine a NATO military client crosses a bright red line in terms of Russia’s security.” Carpenter warned that the situation could escalate into a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the US.

Map of the Black Sea region

The extraordinarily dangerous situation in the Black Sea region can only be understood within its broader international and historical context. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, the culmination of decades of the nationalist betrayal of the October Revolution, the US has sought to offset its economic decline by militarily bringing the entire region under its control. NATO, despite earlier assurances to the contrary, has rapidly encircled Russia. The US, with heavy support from the EU, has also orchestrated several coups in the former Soviet Union to install pro-Western regimes, including in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004, 2014), and Kyrgyzstan (2010).

Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the main architects of US foreign policy for many decades, summed up the significance of “Eurasia,” which encompasses all of Europe and Asia, in 1997: “With Eurasia now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, it no longer suffices to fashion one policy for Europe and another for Asia. What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and historical legacy ... In a volatile Eurasia, the immediate task is to ensure that no state or combination of states gains the ability to expel the United States or even diminish its decisive role.”

Within Eurasia, the Black Sea region is of particular geostrategic significance as it connects Europe, the energy-rich Caucasus and the Middle East.

In 2018, the Pentagon openly declared that the US was now refocusing on “great power conflict,” that is, war preparations against nuclear-armed Russia and China. Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region are central to these efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the war drive, above all by the US. Underlying this are mounting class and political tensions within the United States itself. The Biden administration, following the course of the Trump administration, has taken an extraordinarily aggressive course toward China. At the same time, the US has deliberately

escalated tensions with Russia. Just a few weeks ago, US President Joe Biden called the Russian president a “killer,” triggering a diplomatic crisis.

There are indications that US policy in the Black Sea region targets not only Russia but also China. Over the past decade, China has become a major economic partner of many countries in the region, particularly of Ukraine. While the EU is still Ukraine’s largest trading partner, China has become the single largest nation trading with the country, bypassing Russia. In early 2019, China became Ukraine’s second biggest import partner, accounting for almost 14 percent of total imports, more than Russia. It also became Ukraine’s third largest export partner, with 6.2 percent of total exports.

In the US, Ukraine’s growing economic partnership with China has provoked significant irritation. Notably, in March, right at the time when the Ukrainian government announced its strategy to “retake Crimea,” Kiev also declared that it would cancel a planned \$3.6 billion deal to sell the Ukrainian helicopter and airplane engine maker Motor Sich to Chinese investors, after years of pressure from Washington.

The nationalization of the company comes at enormous economic cost for Ukraine, which is highly indebted and impoverished. Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of the Ukrainian government’s National Security and Defense Council, stated that the decision had been made for the sake of the “national security of the country.” Anders Aslund, a longtime US foreign policy pundit for the region, said that the decision showed that Ukraine “stands with the US even at considerable cost” and called it “an excellent step that the US should greatly appreciate.”

The imperialist war drive poses immense dangers to workers internationally. The Russian oligarchy has nothing to counterpose to the imperialist war drive but a combination of appeals to the imperialist powers, and the promotion of nationalism and militarism. The danger of war can only be averted through the construction of a socialist anti-war movement in the working class and a fight to put an end to the root cause of imperialist war: capitalism.