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Contradicting US, Ukrainian President Zelensky denies Russian attack imminent

For weeks, Washington and its NATO allies have stoked a global war crisis with Russia, claiming that NATO must prepare to defend Ukraine from Russian invasion. Yesterday, in a stunning rebuke to NATO, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied that a Russian invasion was imminent and asked NATO to dial down its war rhetoric.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (en.kremlin.ru)

Yesterday morning, senior Ukrainian officials told CNN that a call between Zelensky and Biden “did not go well.” They said Biden claimed “that a Russian attack may be imminent, saying that an invasion was now virtually certain,” according to CNN. They

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said Zelensky, on the other hand, “restated his position that the threat from Russia remains ‘dangerous but ambiguous,’ and it is not certain that an attack will take place,” CNN reported, urging Biden to “calm down the messaging.”

The US National Security Council (NSC) initially denied this account. “Anonymous sources are leaking falsehoods,” said NSC spokeswoman Emily Horne. “President Biden said that there is a distinct possibility that the Russians could invade Ukraine in February. He has said this publicly and we have been warning about this for months. Reports of anything more or different than that are completely false.”

Zelensky then gave a press conference, however, publicly reiterating statements Horne had denied he had made to Biden. Zelensky was urging NATO heads of state to stop inciting panic with talk of an imminent NATO war with Russia over Ukraine, he said: “I started talking to the leaders of the countries and to explain to them that we need to stabilize the economy. They are saying ‘tomorrow is the war.’ This means panic.”

“The possibility of an attack exists, it has not disappeared and it is not less serious than in 2021,” he said, but adding that “we do not see an escalation greater than” last year, and that he was taking this danger in stride. “We are grateful for the assistance, but we have learned to live with this and develop with this,” he said. “We have learned to protect ourselves, to defend ourselves, and those are our lives to lead.” Given Russia’s overwhelming military superiority over Ukraine, this statement indicates that Zelensky does not fear an all-out Russian invasion.

Zelensky accepted an invitation from Putin for talks: “I’m not afraid of any format of the meeting, bilateral, OK, I don’t care, I’m ready. ... I do support serious dialogue.”

Similarly, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba also dismissed the risk of a Russian invasion: “The number of Russian troops amassed along the border of Ukraine ... is insufficient for a full-scale offensive along the entire Ukrainian border. They also lack some important military indicators and systems to conduct such a large full-scale offensive.” He concluded: “We can say 100 times a day invasion is imminent, but this doesn’t change the situation on the ground.”

NATO war propaganda stands exposed as a pack of lies. For weeks, led by Washington, the NATO powers have been holding war games and announcing new deployments in Eastern Europe. Countless pundits like MSNBC's Colonel Alexander Vindman, who was involved in high-level US-Ukrainian talks, argued that Russian aggression meant that a NATO war to defend Ukraine was virtually unavoidable.

Saying that NATO is "almost locked into a course of action," Vindman insisted that America had to prepare to fight Russia: "Why is this important to the American public? It's important because we're about to have the largest war in Europe since World War II. There's going to be a massive deployment of air power, long-range artillery, cruise missiles, things that we haven't seen unfold on the European landscape more than 80 years, and it is not going to be a clean or sterile environment."

Now, the US-backed regime in Ukraine itself is making clear that NATO calls for war did not reflect Russian preparations for an invasion or Ukrainian requests for help. Rather, they were a provocation concocted by the Biden administration and echoed by the European imperialist powers. The aggressor was not Russia, but NATO.

Beyond its geopolitical appetites in Eurasia, the NATO powers are responding to the deep crisis caused by the pandemic, during which they suffered over 2 million COVID-19 deaths. Amid a massive new wave of cases from the Omicron variant, the NATO powers are moving to scrap whatever remaining public health measures still limit the circulation of the virus. As this policy provokes growing protests across North America and Europe, the NATO powers are trying to divert class tensions outward into an utterly reckless campaign for war with Russia.

The exposure of NATO lies makes all the more urgent the independent mobilization of the international working class against the danger of nuclear war.

Washington, which backed a far-right coup in Kiev that toppled a pro-Russian Ukrainian government in 2014 and set up the current regime, will not abandon its plans against Russia due to Zelensky. To the extent that popular opposition to war in Ukraine and internationally becomes an obstacle, Washington will intensify its far-right plotting of wars and coups.

At the same time, there are increasing signs that the Kremlin, fearing military encirclement and financial strangulation by NATO, is considering military action. They are also receiving unusually-open support from China, which fears that Washington could bring similar pressure to bear on it over Taiwan or other conflict zones.

In a column by its former editor Hu Xijin titled “If US provokes China or Russia, the other won’t be indifferent,” the *Global Times*, a paper known to be close to the Chinese army, issued a blunt warning to Washington.

“The US is strategically squeezing China and Russia at the same time. ... It is pushing China and Russia together to strike back,” Hu wrote, adding: “But when it comes to resisting a US crackdown, Russia is not alone. Most of the Chinese people will support it and are willing to see the Chinese government assist Russia in this aspect. Because we know well that if Russia is crushed by the US, this will bring no good to China at all.”

The Kremlin is also mulling a response to the ultimatum delivered this week by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, demanding that Russia allow neighboring states such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to join NATO and host NATO military facilities.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke yesterday, making clear that Moscow is considering a military response. He said, “If the choice is left up to Russia, there will be no war. We do not want war. But we will not either allow our interests to be grossly violated or ignored.”

As NATO discusses possible sanctions and a cut-off of Russian gas exports, Lavrov added: “As for the menace of sanctions, we told the Americans, also at the presidential level, that ... if they are accompanied by a complete blockade of the financial and economic systems controlled by the West, this will be the equivalent of breaking relations” with Russia. He said that the Kremlin would take retaliatory measures if this happened: “These measures can be very different. I will take decisions based on the proposals that our military command will present.”

Russia is already mounting a highly unusual total mobilization of its navy. Some 140 vessels of all four Russian fleets—the North Fleet, Baltic Sea Fleet, Black Sea Fleet and

Pacific Fleet—will join exercises in the Arctic, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and the Mediterranean and Okhotsk seas.

Ina Holst-Pedersen Kvam of the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy raises that these exercises likely aim to secure stretches of ocean in which Russian ballistic missile submarines can hide. She notes: “It is a fact that in a potential conflict, these submarines will operate from so-called bastions underneath the Arctic Ocean ice, with nuclear attack submarines and other forces as ‘gatekeepers’ to secure the operational freedom of these submarines.”

The purpose would be to threaten NATO that Russia has the ability to launch a devastating strategic strike, obliterating the United States and its NATO allies in a hail of nuclear ballistic missiles.

That such operations are doubtless being considered both by NATO and by Russia and its allies testifies to the mortal crisis of world capitalism and the nation-state system. It is urgent to alert the international working class to the growing war danger and to mobilize it in an international movement against the COVID-19 pandemic and against the danger of a new world war.

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