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NATO's Baltic blockade opens new front in war against Russia

On Monday, the Baltic state of Lithuania, a member of NATO, imposed an effective blockade on Russia, preventing the transportation of many goods, including steel and coal, to its external enclave of Kaliningrad, which is separated from the rest of Russia by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Traditionally, the imposition of a blockade has been seen as an act of war. With this reckless provocation, the United States and its NATO allies are seeking to goad Russia into a military attack on NATO territory, which would lead to the invocation of Article V of the NATO Charter and a full-scale war with Russia.

Faced with a series of military reversals on the ground in Ukraine, the US, NATO and the European powers are seeking to open a new, northern front in the war.

Lithuanian officials implied that the decision to implement the blockade against Russia was taken in close consultation with other NATO members and Washington. "It is not Lithuania doing anything, it is European sanctions that started working," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said.

Responding to the blockade, Russia's foreign ministry bluntly warned, "If cargo transit between the Kaliningrad region and the rest of the Russian Federation via Lithuania is not fully restored in the near future, then Russia reserves the right to take actions to protect its national interests."

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A sharp warning must be made. The United States and European powers, each facing a raging economic, social, and political crisis and fearing a growing social movement of the working class, are recklessly escalating a war that threatens the use of nuclear weapons.

The imposition of a blockade against Russia by a NATO member comes just days after a series of highly provocative statements by European military and civilian leaders.

In an internal message to military service members, Sir Patrick Sanders, the incoming chief of the British general staff, declared, “There is now a burning imperative to forge an Army capable of fighting alongside our allies and defeating Russia in battle.” In a chilling allusion to the First and Second World Wars, he concluded, “We are the generation that must prepare the Army to fight in Europe once again.”

Speaking to the German newspaper *Bild am Sonntag*, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, “We must not cease to support Ukraine... we need to prepare for the fact that it could take years.”

Writing Saturday in the *Times of London*, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson called on NATO to “finish this war on the terms that President Zelensky has laid out,” that is, to reconquer the Donbas and Crimea, which Russia sees as part of its territory.

In yet another blood-curdling threat, Ingo Gerhartz, head of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force), declared that Germany must be prepared to use nuclear weapons, saying, “We need both the means and the political will to implement nuclear deterrence.”

Already, hundreds of Ukrainian troops are dying every single day. What would it mean for the UK and other European countries to fight “alongside” Ukrainian forces in a war against Russia and for this conflict to last “years”?

European officials are describing a war spanning the entirety of the European continent, with deaths in the hundreds of thousands or millions. All of Europe is to be transformed into a massive killing field.

Who was it that decided that a new generation of the youth of Europe should be sent to die en masse in the trenches? Who asked the public if there should be a repeat of World War I?

These statements give the lie to the claims by the US and NATO powers that they are not at war with Russia. This claim, accompanied by the declaration that Russia is “unlikely” to use nuclear weapons, is a desperate attempt to lull the population to sleep while their governments embroil them in a war that threatens to kill millions.

In the latest provocation to further inflame the war, Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union’s top foreign policy official, accused Russia of war crimes for allegedly preventing Ukraine from exporting grains. Breaking the “blockade” of grain exports has been the pretext for an operation, first proposed by retired Admiral James G. Stavridis, to stage a naval battle between NATO and Russian warships in the Black Sea.

The Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad was successively under Polish, Prussian and German control from 1525 to 1945. After the Second World War, it was annexed by the Soviet Union. Kaliningrad is the only Russian Baltic Sea port that remains ice-free year round, and it is critical to the maintenance of Russia’s Baltic Sea fleet. Polish officials, including the former commander of the Land Forces of the Polish Army, have claimed that Kaliningrad is part of Poland.

The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have powerful right-wing movements in dominant government positions. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Landsbergis is the grandson of Vytautas Landsbergis, who founded the far-right Sajudis movement and has advocated banning all symbols of socialism.

The most recent cabinet of Estonia included the fascist Conservative People’s Party of Estonia, whose minister of the interior repeatedly photographed himself flashing a white power hand gesture. The current cabinet of Latvia draws its ministers for economics, culture and agriculture from the fascist and fanatically anti-Russian National Alliance.

These politically unstable statelets, dominated by the extreme right, are being given carte blanche and political support by the imperialist powers to provoke war with Russia.

The actions by the NATO powers speak to a staggering degree of recklessness, which cannot be explained merely by the military setbacks suffered by Ukraine.

Every imperialist country is facing an economic and social crisis for which it has no solution. The COVID-19 pandemic, having killed over 20 million people worldwide, is

accelerating in its third year. The governments of the US, France, the UK and Germany are beset by crisis and instability. All over the world, the cost of living is surging out of control.

In order to impose the cost of the inflationary crisis on the working class, the US Federal Reserve and other central banks are working to raise the unemployment rate by increasing interest rates, in the process triggering a selloff of every financial asset that is, by some measures, without precedent since the Great Depression.

The inflationary crisis is propelling workers into struggle, most visibly manifested in the UK rail strike that begins today. Historically, ruling classes have used war as a means to divert attention outwards, while using the war effort as a pretense to suppress strikes and working class opposition.

The response of the Putin government is completely bankrupt. Putin believes that through military brinkmanship some settlement can be made with the imperialist powers allowing for a more egalitarian distribution of global power. His belief is that, by applying pressure on Russia's "Western partners," he can obtain some sort of settlement to the war.

But there can be no peaceful settlement of the global crisis that has led to the eruption of the war in Ukraine. The imperialist powers are bent on the subjugation and carve-up of Russia and China. They are engaging in a series of provocations that threaten a civilization-ending nuclear war. Any military escalation by Putin in response, like the invasion of Ukraine, can only produce a bloodbath that plays into the hands of the imperialist powers.

There is no military solution to the present crisis, which ultimately cannot be resolved within the framework of the nation-state system. The war is the most advanced expression of a crisis gripping all of capitalist society.

The only way out of this disaster is through the intervention of the working class. As workers enter into struggle against the surging cost of living, they must seek to unite their struggles internationally with the fight against imperialist war. The bloody conflict in Ukraine and its relentless escalation to a Third World War can be stopped only through the

conscious intervention of the working class, mobilized on the basis of a socialist perspective.

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