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## NATO Intensifies Activities to Counter Russia

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NATO is calculating the moves to intensify the diplomatic pressure and give teeth to verbal threats as it is preparing to provoke further escalation of relations with Russia.

Some aspects get little attention or kept below the public radar screen among the whirlpool of events related to Crimea and Ukraine.

In his remarks at the Brookings Institution in Washington, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Russia's stand on Ukraine may affect the prospects for nuclear arms control in Europe, which already faced political challenges. As he stressed, «*Of course I cannot exclude that **the events we have witnessed in Crimea will also have an impact on the thinking about arms control, including nuclear policies***». The head of alliance did not elaborate on whether he was referring to potential changes in NATO's or Russia's positions on the potential for pull-backs of tactical nuclear arms in Europe, or both.

Reversing defense cuts is likely to be a major topic of the NATO summit, British Foreign Secretary William Hague told Sky News earlier this month.

According to reports, an unidentified well placed Western official said, «*NATO is going to have to do a serious rethink about what Article 5 really means*». He added, «*Western nations have minimized the prospect of having to reinforce our Eastern allies. At a stroke, all that has*

*changed».*

## **US calls for getting tougher**

On March 3, the Pentagon announced that all exercises, bilateral meetings, port visits and planning conferences with Russia were off.

A growing bipartisan group of lawmakers, including Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), repeated calls for the U.S. to send military aid to Ukraine. The both stopped short of calling for U.S. troops on CBS' «Face the Nation». *«It's so important that we take actions to deter further Russian aggression against the Ukrainian people»*, Ayotte noted. *«We could send more communications equipment, technological assistance. There are things we could do that don't involve our boots on the ground»*. Durbin encouraged Congress to consider sending weapons. *«It may come to small arms as well»*, he said. **The White House, meanwhile, wouldn't rule out sending military aid to Ukraine.** Deputy National Security Adviser Tony Blinken said that the Obama administration would consider *«every request that we're getting from the Ukrainians»*. *«What we're seeing every day is Russia getting more and more isolated and its economy taking a bigger hit»*, Blinken told CNN on March 23.

*«This requires a complete reappraisal of how we approach Russia»*, said Brookings' Fiona Hill, a former U.S. national intelligence officer who focused on Russia. *«Putin has made it very clear he intends to reassert Russia's sphere of influence... We don't have a strategy to deal with that»*.

## **Military activities intensified**

**NATO is expected to respond by sending more U.S. military forces to Central and Eastern Europe** and by boosting defense spending by European countries.

Although the United States canceled Atlas Vision 2014, which was scheduled to take place in July in the northeastern Russian city of Chelyabinsk, the Pentagon says it will go ahead with plans for a multinational military exercise this summer in Ukraine. As the *Stars and Stripes* reports, *«The fact that the U.S. and its allies chose to go ahead with an exercise in Ukraine while canceling the one in Russia demonstrates Western support for Kiev in its confrontation with Moscow»*.

In July the U.S. Army will take part in Rapid Trident 2014 training exercise to coordinate joint operations between partner militaries in western Ukraine, near the Polish border.

Adam Rippon post is concise but it reflects the gist of the matter well, *«What took you so long; Ukraine, extend the offer to me and I will fight for Ukraine against Russia!!! Love from Ireland!»* This is just another of many remarks posted on the exercise Facebook page reflecting the would-be background of event.

The Rapid Trident is to be held in Lviv near the Polish border. It will *«promote regional stability and security, strengthen partnership capacity, and foster trust while improving interoperability between USAREUR, the land forces of Ukraine, and other (NATO and partner) nations»*, the

USAEUR website says. The Facebook page informs that, «last year's exercises involved «more than 800 pieces of weaponry and about 170 military and combat vehicles... In addition, 4 Mi-8 helicopters, a military transport aircraft An- 26 of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and a German transport aircraft C-160 were involved to work out airborne operations and elements of evacuation of the wounded from the field of battle».

Against the background of Ukrainian events, there may new elements added to the planned scenario. For instance, **the Pentagon refused to provide information on the number of US forces expected to participate in the maneuvers.** In addition to US and UK troops, Rapid Trident 2014 will include units from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine. In its comments on the training event, the US Stars and Stripes wrote, «*The U.S. government has not promised any weapons or intelligence assets to the Ukrainian government, but that could change if the situation escalates*».

The four US F-15C Eagles deployed to that Lithuanian base will be joined by six more F-15s from RAF Lakenheath in England. On March 17, the United Kingdom announced that Typhoon aircraft will join the Policing Mission. The beefed-up U.S. contingent headed to the Baltics more than doubles the number of U.S. warplanes currently patrolling the skies over the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. NATO believes, this increased presence is meant set up a rapid response force that can counter any bullying Kremlin moves, such as sending bombers on runs close to Baltic airspace.

On March 5 US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told Congress that the United States would, separately, boost U.S. training flights with the Polish military. Three C-130s and about 100 personnel from Ramstein, scheduled to arrive in early April, Good said, but given Hagel's remarks, this could change. They will be located at Powidz air base in Poland. «*I think it's clear... that the events of the past week underscore the need for America's continued global engagement and leadership*», Hagel said in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. And a few days ago, **NATO announced E-3 AWACs surveillance aircraft would take off from bases in England and Germany to patrol Poland and Romania, keeping an eye on activity in neighboring Ukraine.**

On March 14 **four NATO members in Central Europe signed a military pact in Visegrad to coordinate defence planning and to create a joint combat unit to operate under NATO and European Union auspices** in response to the Ukraine crisis. The joint body would comprise 3,000 soldiers contributed by the four countries. **The deal signed by the defence ministers of all four countries, also included commitments on joint military exercises and defence spending coordination.** Friday's deal, signed by the defence ministers of all four countries, also included commitments on joint military exercises and defence spending coordination. According to Polish Defence Minister Tomasz Siemoniak, the «V4-EU» combat unit would only be ready to take part in NATO or EU operations by 2016, however, he said, adding that V4 military cooperation was «unique» within the NATO military alliance».

Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi said on March 13 that the V4 members are particularly «vulnerable» to the Ukrainian situation, would be hurt by EU sanctions against

Russia and would expect «solidarity» from other EU member states.

**Warsaw, for its part, is focusing on boosting its domestic antimissile capabilities.** Senior Polish officials on Tuesday held talks with the U.S.-led weapons consortium behind the Medium Extended Air Defense System, the Syracuse Post-Standard reported. Poland is considering the medium-range missile defense MEADS system and three other rival technologies for a potential \$5 billion contract to upgrade the former Soviet satellite state's missile-defense capabilities. There was not much new in his description of the slight uptick in military force deployments. Recent augmentations of F-16 jets to Poland and additional F-15 aircraft to participate in a NATO air patrol mission are only temporary, and will be replaced by other nations' forces when Washington pulls its equipment back, the New York Times reported.

### **Russian military-a combat-ready force to reckon with**

Russia is taking measures in response. Belarus is receiving more Russian warplanes. The Defense Ministry this weekend announced an A-50 early warning aircraft had been redeployed to Baranovichi Airfield in Belarus. These sensor-studded airplanes are crucial to managing airspace during battles, and can coordinate air-to-air and air-to-ground missions of up to 10 warplanes at a time. Last week, the Russian Air Force sent to Belarus six SU-27 fighters that were built to counter the U.S. F-15. They are highly maneuverable but can also conduct air support missions against ground targets.

Russian units in Belarus have just held «tactical exercises» with the new warplanes at the base. By the end of the year, there will be an entire regiment, 24 SU-27s, in Belarus.

The S-400 (Triumph) new long-range air defense systems with missile defense capability have been recently installed in the Moscow Zvenigorod, Electrostal and Dmitrov suburban areas. The new weapon is capable of striking aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicle and incoming ballistic missiles at the distance of 400 km. The systems are protected by Pantsir-S1 short-to-medium range ground based air defence system, wheeled, tracked or stationary with two to three operators. It consists of automatic anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air-missiles with radar or optical target-tracking and radio-command guidance and capable to track 36 targets at once. **S-500s (55R6M «Triumfator-M») are to join the armed forces inventory shortly. The S-500 is a new generation (not an upgrade) surface-to-air missile system, designed for intercepting intercontinental ballistic missiles and for defense against Airborne Early Warning and Control System and jamming.** With a planned range of 600 km (373 mi), the S-500 would be able to detect and simultaneously engage up to 10 ballistic supersonic targets flying at a speed of 5 km/s and will have a flight ceiling of 400 km. This missile defense system is capable of hitting strategic warheads in flight.

The Russia Defense Ministry has allocated \$55 billion for defense purposes greatly enhancing the air defense capability, introducing into armed forces inventory new SU-35 fighters and SSBNs. **The recent world events, including the situation around the Russia's borders, give testimony to the fact that nobody cares about those who are weak. As a rule, international law and moral standards are forgotten by those who are strong.** For instance, Yugoslavia was a country with market economy which posed no whatsoever threat to the West. It was

bombed and divided while the whole world was watching.

The attitude towards Russia is obvious. As soon as it vetoed the US-initiated resolution which banned the right to self-determination of Crimea stated in the article I of UN Charter, Russian ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin was literally attacked by US colleague Samantha Power who, being overly emotional, walked over to him and said that Russia was a loser not a winner in Cold War.

Nobody treats a loser as equal. In fact **Russia never lost the Cold War, but rather put an end to it. It continues to be a great power with its own internal and foreign policies implemented without looking back at the so-called «winners» overseas.** To prevent any temptation to test Russia's will power to defend its independence it enhances its military potential, especially air defense. **Strengthening defensive capabilities is the best way to make others have a more realistic vision of the world and its realities.**