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US prepares to send troops to Poland

By Johannes Stern

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The *Washington Post* reported Friday that Poland and the United States would announce next week the deployment of US ground troops to Poland as part of an expansion of NATO military forces in Central and Eastern Europe, in response to the crisis in Ukraine.

According to the *Post*, Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak, visiting the newspaper after meeting with US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel at the Pentagon, said, “the decision has been made on a political level and that military planners are working out details.” The article continued: “There will also be intensified cooperation in air defense, special forces, cyberdefense and other areas. Poland will play a leading regional role, ‘under US patronage,’ he said.”

The report makes clear that the US entered into the Geneva agreement with Russia, purportedly to “deescalate tensions” in Ukraine, in bad faith, intending to use Russia’s supposed breach of the deal as justification for expanded sanctions and a further aggressive buildup of US and NATO forces in Eastern Europe aimed at encircling and strangling Russia.

The dispatch of US troops to Poland is a reckless and provocative move that heightens the very real danger not only of civil war in Ukraine, but of war by the US, Germany and NATO against

Russia, a nuclear power. It underscores the fact that the crisis in Ukraine was deliberately provoked by Washington to create the pretext for a political, economic, diplomatic and military offensive against Russia that had long been in the planning.

There is no sign that the Geneva agreement will have any impact on antigovernment demonstrators in eastern Ukraine who have seized buildings and declared vehement opposition to the right-wing, ultranationalist regime in Kiev. That government was installed last February in a putsch orchestrated by Washington and Berlin.

The demonstrators in the east of Ukraine have dismissed the joint statement issued Thursday by the United States, the European Union, Ukraine and Russia calling for an end to protests and occupations.

On Friday, demonstrations continued in eastern Ukrainian cities where activists have seized buildings. In the far eastern city of Lugansk, a militia member named Andrei declared that his group had no plans to give up, declaring, "Everything on the ground is the same as it was yesterday and the day before and the day before that. We're not leaving."

In Donetsk, the region's industrial center, with a population of nearly 1 million, a sign on the barricades summed up the mood amongst broad layers of the residents who are deeply hostile to imperialist meddling in Ukraine. It read: "Bloodthirsty America. Despicable Europe. Leave Ukraine alone."

Some protesters denounced Russia's decision to sign a document with the Western powers calling for an end to the antigovernment actions. Activists stressed that they would not leave seized government buildings or disarm until the interim government in Kiev resigned and fascistic groups such as Right Sector, which played a key role in the February 22 putsch against the democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovych, gave up their weapons and ended their own occupations in the west of the country.

Denis Pushilin, the leader of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic," declared that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who attended the Geneva talks, "did not sign anything for us, he signed on behalf of the Russian Federation." Alexei, a protester in Slavyansk, told Reuters that Russian President Vladimir Putin was losing support. Referring to Putin as "Vova," he said, "It turns out Vova doesn't love us as much as we thought."

These comments underscore the lying character of the propaganda pumped out by Western governments and media claiming that the protesters in eastern Ukraine are Russian soldiers or agents whose actions are dictated by Moscow. It is increasingly clear that the protests are an expression of popular opposition to the Western-backed regime in Kiev, which includes open fascists, anti-Semites and anti-Russian chauvinists and has pledged to impose brutal austerity measures against the working class.

While Russia is seeking to strike a deal with Washington and the EU, the regime in Kiev and its imperialist backers are seizing on the Geneva talks to provide a further pretext for mobilizing military forces against antigovernment protesters in eastern Ukraine and expanding NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe to threaten Russia itself.

The ink on the joint statement—declaring that “all sides must refrain from any violence, intimidation, or provocative actions”—was not yet dry when Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Deshchytsia said the government's so-called “antiterrorist operation” against pro-Russian protesters would continue. He cynically added that its intensity would “depend on the practical implementation” of the agreement.

The spokeswoman of the Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU), Marina Ostapenko, said the “antiterror operation” would continue “as long as terrorists remain in our country.” She added: “In line with the Easter holidays and the Geneva agreements, operations are now in an inactive phase. Headquarters is working and re-planning is underway.”

The Ukrainian government and its allies in Washington and Berlin see the Geneva agreement as providing a brief pause during which they can reorganize and intensify the military operation that was planned last weekend, when CIA Director John Brennan stole into Kiev for talks with the regime. The operation began Tuesday with the assault on the Kramatorsk military airfield, but came to a halt when the Ukrainian army confronted popular resistance and soldiers refused to attack and some went over to the side of the demonstrators.

The Pentagon provocatively announced plans to send more aid to the Ukrainian army. “This will be items like water purification, uniforms, medical supplies and the kinds of things that can help them sustain themselves in the field,” Rear Admiral John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, told CNN.

Washington's increased military support for Kiev is part of a NATO buildup in Eastern Europe aimed at encircling Russia. On Wednesday, the German government announced plans to send at least one warship and six Eurofighter combat planes to Eastern Europe. A flotilla of five mine detectors headed by the German ship “Elbe” is due to depart to the Baltic Sea.

Also on Wednesday, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced a massive NATO escalation in Eastern Europe.

Washington plans to cite the continuation of the protests in eastern Ukraine to claim that Moscow has violated the Geneva agreement, supposedly justifying the imposition of harsher economic sanctions against Russia and an even aggressive deployment of military forces. US Secretary of State John Kerry said, “the responsibility will lie with those who have organized” the groups protesting in the east of the country—a reference to Russia. He added: “If there is not

progress over the course of these next days and we don't see a movement in the right direction, then there will be additional sanctions, additional costs as a consequence."

President Barack Obama took the same line at a news conference on Thursday. "I don't think we can be sure of anything at this point," he said, and added that the US and its allies had to "be prepared to potentially respond to what continues to be efforts of interference by the Russians in eastern and southern Ukraine."

Echoing Washington's position, Right Sector spokesman Artem Skoropadsky declared that he saw the Geneva agreement as being directed only at pro-Russian protesters in the east. He claimed that Right Sector did not "have any illegal weapons, and so the call to disarm will not apply to us." He added that "the vanguard of the Ukrainian revolution should not be compared to outright gangsters."