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NATO Steps Up Hostilities over Ukraine (II)

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US leads the race

The US military is working with the State Department and NATO allies to provide support to Ukraine. Evelyn N. Farkas, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 6, «*we will use all available tools to provide meaningful cost-effective support to Ukraine's security institutions*». DOD officials also continue to engage with their Ukrainian counterparts, Farkas said, noting that **a high-level US-Ukraine meeting is scheduled next month**. The United States is also taking steps to support non-NATO partners – such as Moldova and Georgia, she said...

Some senators are pushing Mr. Obama to take tougher, faster action against Russia. Carl Levin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Bob Corker, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, want the administration to examine the possibility of permanently stationing US forces in the Baltic republics.

At that, just 6% of Americans would use force over Ukraine, says a Pew poll.

Last month the U.S. Navy began deploying the Standard Missile 3 Block 1B interceptor designed to counter ballistic missiles. The system is widely believed to have strategic missile kill capability. It is planned for fielding on U.S. warships home-ported in Rota, Spain, and starting in

2015 at an interceptor base in Romania which is currently under construction. An earlier version of the ship-based interceptor was redeployed to the Black Sea for a short period in April amid resurgent tensions with Russia. Some NATO countries have explicitly linked the missile shield to the goal of deterring it. Poland announced in March that as a response to the events in Ukraine, it would accelerate the timetable for acquiring a domestic antimissile capability that would be linked to the NATO system. **It's worth mentioning that a Senate bill was filed at the beginning of the month that would require the U.S. government to study speeding up by several years the schedule for deploying next-generation Block 2A interceptors in Poland.** The US acts as a bully perfectly knowing Russia cannot stand idle in front of the threat.

Russia's response

The US missile defense effort has not gone unnoticed in Russia. *«We feel the symptoms of the work on various segments of the [missile defense system being intensified]»,* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying on May 6. **Ryabkov also warned that Western missile defense moves could jeopardize the New START arms control accord.** Russian Defense Ministry's head of international military cooperation Sergei Koshelev said **NATO had rejected a proposal to hold an "expert dialogue" on the issues related to the missile defense shield.**

Russia could deploy short-range Iskander missiles in the country's westernmost Kaliningrad region if NATO decides to strengthen its military presence in Eastern Europe, Lt. Gen. Yevgeny Buzhinsky told RIA Novosti. *«Russia is a nuclear power»,* he said. ***«If NATO becomes more active, we will deploy a division of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad Region»,*** he added. General Buzhinsky previously headed the department of international agreements in the Russian Defense Ministry.

Franz Klintsevich, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defense, told RIA Novosti that deployment of NATO infrastructure in Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States endangers these countries and Russia should diplomatically deliver this message to the leadership of these states. ***«A serious object in the Lithuanian territory, any modern nuclear weapon – means Lithuania basically doesn't exist anymore, and politicians should understand that, this is a serious issue»,*** Klintsevich said.

It is important to add that the NATO's actions are an outright breach of the Russia-NATO Founding Act of 1997 which states that NATO, given the «current and foreseeable security environment», wouldn't pursue «additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces» in Eastern and Central Europe.

Putin - Burkharter arrangement – great chance to use

President Putin made peaceful suggestions on Ukraine after talks in Moscow with Didier Burkhalter, the Swiss President and current Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). According to him, the upcoming Ukraine's presidential election on 25 May is a step "in the right direction" on the condition that the rights of "all citizens" were protected. The Russian President suggested that Kiev's military operation in eastern Ukraine

(considered to be a punitive action against civilians by Russia) could be halted in exchange for a postponement of the referendum scheduled to take place in several areas on May 11. He also said he had pulled back Russian forces from the border with Ukraine to "places of regular exercises, at training grounds". The OSCE proposed a roadmap for the Ukrainian crisis settlement to all four parties, which signed the Geneva accords, soon. The document offers concrete steps including ceasefire, de-escalation of tension, establishment of a dialogue and elections.

This turn of events creates a basis for reduction of tension and joining efforts to tackle the Ukraine's crisis in a constructive way. With negative consequences the further aggravation of stand-off over Ukraine may entail, it would be a folly to let this opportunity slip away. But a positive political process has no chance in the conditions of saber-rattling on the part of NATO and deploying forces in the immediate vicinity of Russian border on rotating or even permanent basis. It also has no chances if NATO expedites the implementation of its missile defense plans. The missile shield is a sensitive issue and the alliance leaders know it well. This is the moment to give peace a chance.