

### III. International

# NATO Threatens To Cross Moscow's Red Lines

by Carl Osgood

Dec. 3—Over recent weeks, the situation in and around Ukraine has become extremely serious, fueled by Western accusations that Russia is preparing to invade and Russian concerns that NATO is getting ever closer to Moscow, threatening Russian national security. NATO first promised Ukraine (and Georgia) eventual NATO membership at its 2008 summit in Bucharest and has reaffirmed that promise numerous times since, including at the just-concluded foreign ministers meeting in Riga, Latvia. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has even spoken of moving NATO nuclear weapons from Germany to Eastern Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin has clearly stated that Ukrainian membership in NATO is a “red line” for Moscow while his Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that Ukrainian membership in the alliance is a security matter for Russia. Putin even directed Lavrov to seek guarantees from NATO regarding Russian security, including a binding agreement that Ukraine would never become a member of the alliance.

President Joe Biden raised the strategic temperature by telling reporters that he doesn't care about Moscow's red lines. “We're aware of Russia's actions for a long time and my expectation is we're going to have a long discussion with Putin,” Biden told reporters as he departed for a weekend trip to Camp

David on Dec. 3—“I don't accept anybody's red lines.” Earlier in the day, Biden promised to make things difficult for Putin should he decide to invade. “And what I am doing is putting together, what I believe to be, will be the most comprehensive and meaningful



NATO

*Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General.*



MID.ru

*Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister.*



White House/Adam Schultz

*Joe Biden, U.S. President.*



Kremlin Pool Photo/Mikhail Metzel

*Vladimir Putin, Russian President.*

set of initiatives to make it very, very difficult for Mr. Putin to go ahead and do what people are worried he may do,” he said in response to a reporter’s question. “But that’s in play right now.”

### **Russia Will Have To Pay a ‘High Price’**

The North Atlantic alliance, in fact, is totally consumed with the specter of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. In response to this specter, NATO, led by Stoltenberg and the United States, is threatening the severest of consequences for Russia should it go ahead with such an invasion, just short of a response under Article 5 of the NATO treaty. Ukraine is still not a member of the alliance and so is not covered by its security guarantee that an attack on one is an attack on all. Nonetheless, the measures promised by NATO during its foreign ministers meeting on Nov. 30–Dec. 1, and the alliance’s increasingly aggressive behavior, risk crossing Russia’s red lines, as clearly laid out by Putin over the past two weeks, and heightening the danger of a nuclear war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Dec. 1 during a television interview before leaving Latvia for the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) ministerial meeting to begin in Stockholm the following day, promised that he would take NATO’s “concerns” to Lavrov, with whom he was to meet in Stockholm. “We’ve had many consultations with allies and partners in recent weeks, all focused on the concerns we have about the situation in and around Ukraine, and particularly what we’re seeing in terms of very irregular movements and mobilization of Russian forces on the Ukrainian border, the deep concern that that is provoking among all the Allies. And we’ve already had the opportunity to share those concerns directly with Moscow,” he said, according to the State Department transcript. He warned that “if Russia were to engage in further aggression against Ukraine, there would be serious consequences.”

There is a diplomatic path that’s available, he declared. “The Russians say that they believe the Minsk agreement should be implemented,” he said. “The Ukrainians say the same thing. Well, I think if that were to happen, that at least would resolve the problem in the Donbas in eastern Ukraine. It doesn’t resolve Crimea, but it does resolve the problem in eastern Ukraine.”

NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, during a separate interview with Reuters the same day was

equally threatening. The alliance has “made it very clear that, first of all, this is a Russian military build-up, which is unexplained and unjustified. Therefore, we call on Russia to be transparent, to reduce tensions and to de-escalate,” he said. “If they do the opposite and actually decide to, once again, use force against Ukraine then we have made it clear and ministers made that clear during the NATO foreign ministerial meeting in Latvia today, that Russia will then have to pay a high price. There will be serious consequences for Russia and that’s a clear message from NATO.”

### **NATO the Provocateur**

But it is NATO that is the provocateur. Stoltenberg issued a particularly serious provocation Nov. 23, when he was asked about the implications of the possibility that a German Green-Social Democrat-Free Democrat governing coalition, then still being formed, could decide to take Germany out of the NATO nuclear sharing arrangement. “Germany can, of course, decide whether there will be nuclear weapons in your country,” he said, “but the alternative is that we easily end up with nuclear weapons in other countries in Europe, also to the east of Germany.”

On Nov. 30, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, during a TV interview, responded to Stoltenberg’s statement: “I would offer Putin to return nuclear weapons to Belarus.”

Lavrov in remarks to Russia’s Federation Council on Dec. 1 said:

I would describe this statement as a serious warning prompted by the reckless policy that is being pursued by the West. ... Jens Stoltenberg said that if Germany was unwilling to keep nuclear weapons, they would move them to the east, i.e., to former socialist countries. What else needs to be explained to our Western colleagues to stop this sort of folly? I would say Alexander Lukashenko reacted to these irresponsible statements, designed to not only build up confrontation but to try and provoke a military conflict. I don’t know what they are hoping to achieve, but this is an outrageous position. If they are entertaining an idea like this—to deploy nuclear weapons in Poland, Romania, or some other place close to the Russian Federation in violation of all things imaginable, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Russia-NATO

Founding Act,—then hardball counterexamples must be used to show the futility of this sort of undertaking.

In the event, the German coalition announced that indeed, it would keep Germany in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement, to include the continued storage of twenty B61 nuclear bombs at an airbase in central Germany. Nonetheless, the shock of Stoltenberg's statement remains.

The roots of the current crisis go back to 1991 when NATO, unlike the Warsaw Pact, refused to disband, instead expanding eastwards all the way up to Russia's borders despite promises made in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall that it wouldn't. NATO arms are now about 1,000 km closer to Moscow than during the Cold War, a geographical fact that, along with the psychological importance of it in Russia, is never acknowledged by NATO's partisans. The expansion of the alliance was set into motion during the Clinton Administration and began with the addition of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999, and then proceeded through Baltic countries and southward into the Balkans in 2004. In 2008, Ukraine and Georgia were both promised NATO membership at the alliance's summit in Bucharest.

### The British, Again

Also paved over in the NATO narrative is the U.S./EU-backed coup in Kiev in 2014, which not only overthrew a democratically-elected government, but installed a regime that depends heavily on neo-Nazi groups to maintain its authority. In response to this reality, the people of Crimea announced their loyalty to Moscow, and revolts broke out in the largely Russian-speaking Donbas region. In 2018, Volodymyr Zelensky was elected President of Ukraine on



CC/Olaf Kosinsky

*Olaf Scholz, incoming Chancellor of the "traffic light" coalition government in Germany.*

the promise that he would seek peace in the Donbas, but has instead been totally absorbed by the same neo-Nazi apparatus that ran the 2014 coup. Since the time of the Kiev coup, NATO has greatly increased its military deployments in the Baltic countries and in Poland, and has expanded its exercises from the Barents Sea in the Arctic through the Baltic Sea and down to the Black Sea.

But behind the NATO narrative of a Russia threatening to invade Ukraine is a set of talking points provided by the British Empire's premier think tank, the

Royal Institute for International Affairs, also known as Chatham House. On Nov. 24, the RIIA issued a [report](#) entitled "Ukraine-Russia relations: Explaining the two countries' intertwined histories, the armed conflicts in Crimea and the Donbas region, and disputes over gas supplies." The report, authored by Orysia Lutsevych, the Head and Research Fellow of the Ukraine Forum of RIIA's Russia and Eurasia Program, claims that "The origins of the current conflict lie in Russia's long-standing aspiration to control its periphery."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has three objectives in Ukraine, Lutsevych claims: bringing Ukraine back into its "sphere of influence"; Putin wants to solidify his rule at home by preventing "the emergence of an alternative, democratic system of government on the Russian border"; and third, "Putin uses Ukraine to feed a wider narrative of Russia as being a fortress under siege by the West and needing a strong commander-in-chief to protect its 'civilization'."

### Putin Draws Russia's 'Red Lines'

Russian President Putin, meanwhile, has issued a number of statements over the past two weeks warning America and NATO that Russia does indeed



UN/Loey Felipe

*Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine.*



U.S. Navy/Trey Fowler

*U.S. Marines practice war in NATO Exercise Sea Breeze 2021 in Oleshky Sands, Ukraine, on Russia's border, July 2, 2021.*

have red lines, and the alliance is getting very close to crossing them. “Indeed, we constantly express our concerns about these matters and talk about red lines, but of course, we understand that our partners are peculiar in the sense that they have a very—how to put it mildly—superficial approach to our warnings about red lines,” he said during a Nov. 18 address to the Russian Foreign Ministry Board, referring to NATO’s eastwards expansion, about which Russian concerns “have been totally ignored.”

There have been several waves of expansion, and let’s look at where the military infrastructure of the NATO bloc is now—anti-missile defense systems have been deployed right next to our borders in Romania and Poland. These can easily be put to offensive use with the Mk-41 launchers there; replacing the software takes only minutes. Nevertheless, our recent warnings have had a certain effect: tensions have arisen there, anyway.

Putin first of all said in this regard that it’s vital to ensure that the tensions with NATO do not escalate into a conflict which Russia does not need. Then, turning to Lavrov, he said “It is imperative to push for serious long-term guarantees that ensure Russia’s security in this area, because Russia cannot constantly be thinking about what could happen there tomorrow.” As difficult as reaching an agreement in this area might be, Putin said, “we need to work on this, and I want you to keep that in mind.”

Later, Putin returned to the subject of NATO which, he noted,

has adopted a markedly confrontational stance and is stubbornly and demonstratively bringing its military infrastructure closer to our borders, as I mentioned earlier. Moreover, NATO was the one that broke our dialogue mechanisms. Of course, we will provide a proper response to NATO’s military activity along Russia’s borders, but, most impor-



U.S. Navy/Andrew Eder

*The USS Mount Whitney (right), command ship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet. It also serves as the Afloat Command Platform of NATO Naval Striking and Support Forces. Here it maneuvers with a Bulgarian frigate in the Black Sea, Nov. 4, 2021.*

tantly, Brussels must understand that alleviating military-political tensions is not only in Russia's interest, but also in the interest of Europe and the world in general.

On Nov. 30, in response to a question put to him at the "Russia Calling!" Investment Forum, Putin said that the point is not whether or not there's to be an invasion of Ukraine. "The point at issue is to develop relations aimed at fairer and more stable development based on respect for the security interests of all the participants in international affairs," he said. "If we work towards this sincerely, nobody will feel any threats." Another point that Putin made was that Russia has legitimate security interests as well. "The Russian Federation also has certain apprehensions regarding the large-scale military exercises held near its border, including unscheduled ones, like the recent Black Sea drills during which strategic bombers, which are known to carry precision and possibly even nuclear weapons, made flights within 20 kilometers of our border," he said. "All this is posing a threat to us."

Our relationship was almost idyllic, especially in the mid-1990s, when we nearly became allies [he continued]. However, despite all our warnings, conversations, and requests, the [NATO's] infrastructure ultimately approached our border. The situation went as far as the deployment of BMD [Ballistic Missile Defense—ed.] systems in Poland and Romania, and the launchers that have been stationed there, the Mk 41, can be used to launch Tomahawk missiles and other strike systems. This is creating a threat to us—this is an obvious fact.

Putin concluded this point:

What has happened in response to all our appeals and requests not to do this? You can see it now. As a result, we had to—I want to stress this—we had to reciprocate by launching the creation of hypersonic weapons. This was our response. But we were not the first to start all this—it all began when our partners withdrew from the ABM Treaty and later from the INF [Intermediate Nuclear Forces—ed.] treaty.

The issue of the development of NATO's infrastructure ever closer to Russia's borders "concerns the possible deployment in the territory of Ukraine of strike systems with the flight time of 7-10 minutes to Moscow, or five minutes in the case of hypersonic systems. Just imagine that," Putin said. "The flight time to Moscow is five minutes [for these systems]."

So, what should we do? We would need to create similar systems to be used against those who are threatening us.... But we can do this already now, because we have held successful tests, and early next year we will put a new sea-launched hypersonic missile with a maximum speed of Mach 9 on combat duty. [Here he referred to the Tsirkon ship-launched hypersonic missile.] The flight time to those who issue orders, will also be five minutes.

The creation of such threats for us is the red line.



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