



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 3, 2014

NATO Exercise in Ukraine Will Place U.S. Close to Conflict

Rapid Trident, a joint military exercise conducted annually for the past few years by U.S. Army, NATO, and the Ukrainian military, will go ahead this month from September 16-26. The exercise was initially scheduled for July, but was delayed due to the ongoing crisis in the Ukraine.

Reuters reported that U.S. Navy Captain Gregory Hicks, spokesman for the U.S. Army's European Command, said on September 2, "At the moment, we are still planning for [Rapid Trident] to go ahead."

Reuters reported that more than 1,100 NATO and U.S. troops will participate in Rapid Trident, which will take place in the Yavoriv training center in western Ukraine near its border with Poland. The U.S. European Command (EUCOM) reported that the exercise will include about 200 U.S. personnel as well as 1,100 others from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Britain, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Spain. Some of these countries, including Ukraine, which not NATO members, are members of NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program.

The eastern and southern areas of Ukraine, near the Russian border, have been the site of unrest and conflict since the end of February 2014, when violent demonstrations by pro-Russian and anti-government groups occurred in major cities across those regions. Russian troops soon occupied the Crimean Peninsula, and a subsequent referendum and parliament vote resulted in the Crimean Parliament declaring independence from Ukraine and requesting to join the Russian Federation. Russia annexed Crimea in March.

Unrest has continued in the eastern areas of Ukraine, as Russian-supported rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces since April. And separatists in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk declared independence after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

The Reuters report reflected a widespread belief that the decision to go ahead with Rapid Trident "is seen as a sign of the commitment of NATO states to support non-NATO member Ukraine while stopping well short of military intervention in the conflict."

On Wednesday, President Obama was in Tallinn, Estonia, one of the three Baltic States that were under Soviet occupation from the 1940s until the 1990s. Russia's intervention in Ukraine has unnerved some in the region, who fear that Russia may attempt to exert its influence among their Russian-speaking citizens. All three states — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania — are now NATO members.

The *New York Times* quoted from Obama's speech to more than 1,800 students, young professionals, and civic and political leaders at a concert hall in Tallinn, during which he voiced harsh criticism of the Russian role in Ukraine. "It is a brazen assault on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, a sovereign and independent European nation," Obama said. "It challenges that most basic of principles of our international system — that borders cannot be redrawn at the barrel of a gun; that nations have the right to determine their own future."





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Obama laid the blame squarely on Moscow for the continuation of the unrest there.

“It was not the government in Kiev that destabilized eastern Ukraine; it’s been the pro-Russian separatists who are encouraged by Russia, financed by Russia, trained by Russia, supplied by Russia and armed by Russia,” said Obama. “These are the facts. They are provable. They are not subject to dispute.”

The *Times* reported that Obama’s speech was delivered before it was reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin had proposed a seven-point plan to end the conflict in Ukraine that could become effective on Friday — when Obama and other leaders of NATO countries will be meeting in Wales to draft an alliance response to Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. The *Times* reporter observed that Putin’s announcement appeared “deliberately timed to blunt that effort.”

In an article that was critical of the U.S. decision to go ahead with the military exercise just as Putin and Ukraine’s President Petro Poroshenko seemed close to reaching a cease-fire agreement, contributing writer Kenneth Raoza wrote in *Forbes* on September 3:

On Wednesday, just hours after Putin managed to convince pro-Russia separatists to cease fire, President Obama said in Estonia ahead of the upcoming NATO Summit that the U.S. and NATO would not allow a foreign country to encroach on its friends. He said this after blaming Moscow for the political turmoil in Ukraine. He was a hair away from saying that the U.S. would protect Ukraine from a Russian military attack.

Without denying that present-day Russia is the unquestionable successor to the old Soviet Union that Ronald Reagan once described as “the Evil Empire” (Putin began his long career in government with the old Soviet KGB, which was replaced by the Russian FSB and SVR), the creation of NATO — presumably as a bulwark to guard Western Europe from Soviet invasion — can still be seriously questioned.

NATO was established by the United States and Western European nations in 1949 with the stated purpose of forming a defensive alliance against a possible Soviet invasion of Western Europe. The mission was seen as a temporary one, to last only until nations such as France, (then) West Germany, and Italy could recover from the devastation of World War II and become capable of providing for their own defense. When General Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed command of NATO forces in 1951, he said: “If in 10 years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.”

Yet, 65 years later, and nearly a quarter of a century after the end of the Soviet era in 1991, approximately 68,000 U.S. troops are still in Europe. Instead of being phased out, NATO has been expanded to include from the original 12 members to 28 today.

Aside from the tremendous expense of the United States maintaining such a large military presence abroad, there are even more serious dangers to U.S. well-being created by our continued participation in NATO.

A major downside to U.S. membership in NATO is its ability to draw our country into armed conflicts that go beyond our government’s constitutional obligations to provide for our nation’s own defense. As *The New American’s* editor, Gary Benoit, [noted](#) in his article of April 5, 2009:

Under NATO, the United States is expected to view an attack on any of the 27 other member nations — including Soviet-era Warsaw Pact nations that provided the rationale for creating NATO



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in 1949 — as an attack upon the United States. Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty makes this clear: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.”

NATO is exactly the sort of entangling alliance that our Founding Fathers warned us against. “It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliance with any portion of the foreign world,” George Washington stated in his Farewell Address to us. The inaugural statement of Thomas Jefferson was equally clear: “Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none.”

A surprising (given its source) warning against entangling alliances that specifically mentioned NATO appeared in the July 1970 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the strongly interventionist Council on Foreign Relations. The author demonstrated that participation in NATO actually threatens the separation of powers that gives Congress the power to declare war:

It is a constitutional principle that the President of the United States is empowered to repel enemy attacks on us but requires a Congressional Declaration of War in order to take other or further measures of war. If it is now agreed by treaty that an attack on a Latin or NATO ally is deemed an attack on the United States, then it can be argued that the President is empowered without Congressional authorization to send us to war in such case; and the significant legal effect of the Rio and North Atlantic treaties would be to transfer from the Congress to the President the constitutional power to declare war, in so far as European and Latin American events are concerned.

That is an amazingly significant by-product of our membership in NATO!

When President Truman was asked where he derived authority to use U.S. forces in the Korean conflict without a declaration of war, he replied that, because he could send troops to NATO, he could send troops to Korea. Our forces fought in Korea under UN command with UN flags flying, which was not so different from serving under NATO, which is a “Regional Arrangement” of the UN.

NATO derives its legitimacy from Articles 51-54 of the UN Charter. Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated openly that approval of NATO was “an essential measure for strengthening the United Nations.”

Our membership in the UN and NATO has facilitated U.S. involvement in war after war, from Korea (under the UN), to Vietnam (under SEATO, another such “Regional Arrangement”) and even Iraq and Afghanistan. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush bypassed Congress and went to the UN for authority to invade Iraq. Shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush said that the actions then being taken against Afghanistan “have been defined by the United Nations.” The second invasion of Iraq in 2003 was authorized by UN Security Council resolutions 678 and 687. And reports from NATO headquarters in Brussels openly stated that whatever actions our forces took in Afghanistan must be approved by NATO.

Americans who have grown weary of our involvement in one foreign conflict after another should urge our leaders to withdraw our nation from the United Nations, NATO, and all other international entanglements.

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