

Maligned in Western Media, Donbass Forces Are Defending Their Future from Ukrainian Shelling and Fascism

America is widely understood to be a key instigator behind conflict in Ukraine that has pitted brother against brother

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Smearred, stigmatized, and lied about in Western media propaganda, the mostly Russian-speaking people of the Donbass region were being slaughtered by the thousands in a brutal war of "ethnic cleansing" launched against them by the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv, which the U.S. installed after the CIA overthrew Ukraine's legally elected president in a 2014 coup.

Although the Donbass people had been pleading for Russian military aid to defend them against the increasingly murderous military assaults by the Ukraine government forces, which killed more than 14,000 of their people, Russian President Vladimir Putin declined to intervene. Instead, he tried to broker a peace agreement between the warring parties.

But the U.S. and Britain secretly colluded to sabotage peace negotiations, persuading president Zelensky to ignore the Minsk III peace agreement that the Ukraine government had previously signed, and which had been countersigned by Russia, France and Germany.

Realizing that the U.S. and its NATO allies would never permit peace negotiations to succeed, Putin finally sent troops into Ukraine on February 24. Russian troops went in to support and reinforce the outnumbered and outgunned Donbass Special Forces who had been defending their land against attacks by the Kyiv government for nearly eight years.

Voices From the Frontlines of Eastern Ukraine

In the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in October, I went to a frontline outpost 70 meters from Ukrainian forces in Avdeevka (north and west of Donetsk), according to the Donbas commanders I spoke with there.

To reach that position, I went with two other journalists to a meeting point with two commanders of Pyatnashka—volunteer fighters, [including](#) Abkhazi, Slovak, Russian, Ossetian and other nationalities, including locals from Donbas.

From there, they drove us to a point as far as they could drive before walking the rest of the way, several minutes through brush and trenches, eventually coming to their sandbagged wood and cement fortified outpost.

It has changed hands over the years, Ukrainian forces sometimes occupying it, Donbas forces now controlling it.

One soldier, a unit commander who goes by the call sign “Vydra” (Otter), was formerly a miner from the DPR who had been living in Russia with his family. In 2014, he returned to the Donbas to defend his mother and relatives still there. He spoke of the outpost.

“We dug and built this with our hands. Several times over the years, the Ukrainians have taken these positions. We pushed them back, they stormed us...Well, we have been fighting each other for eight years.”

There, artillery fire is the biggest danger they face.

“You can hide from a sniper, but not from artillery, and they’re using large caliber.”



His living quarters is a dank, cramped room with a tiny improvised bed, with another small room and bed for others at the outpost.

Image: “Vydra,” a unit commander of the Pyatnashka fighters. [Source: Photo courtesy of Eva Bartlett]

A sign reads: “*If shelling occurs, go to the shelter.*” The kind of sign you see all over Donetsk and cities of the Donbas, due to Ukraine’s incessant shelling of civilian, residential areas. In a frontline outpost where incoming artillery is the norm, the sign is slightly absurd, clearly a joke.

An Orthodox icon sits atop the sign. Ukrainian nationalists hang and spray Nazi graffiti and slogans of death; these fighters revere their faith.

A poster, with the DPR flag, reads: “*We have never known defeat, and it’s clear that this has been decided from above. Donbas has never been forced to its knees, and no one will ever be allowed to.*”

The only things decorating the space are tins of tuna and canned meat, instant noodles, and washing powder. Their existence is bare minimum, nothing glamorous about it; they volunteer because, as they told me, this is their land and they will protect it.

Perhaps surprising to some, when Vydra was asked whether he hates Ukrainians, he replied emphatically no, he has friends and relatives in Ukraine.

“We have no hatred for Ukraine. We hate those nationalists who came to power. But ordinary Ukrainians? Why? Many of us speak Ukrainian. We understand them, they understand us. Many of them speak Russian.

I’ve been involved in sports a lot of time, wrestling. So, I’ve got a lot of friends in Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Kirovograd, Odessa, Lvov, Ivano-Frankivsk, Transcarpathia.

I have relatives in western Ukraine, and we still communicate. Yes, they say one thing on the street, but when we talk to each other, they say, ‘Well, you have to, because the SBU is listening.’

Ukraine shouts about democracy, then puts people in handcuffs for no reason. My aunt got in trouble because they found my photo on her Skype.

And I’m on the Myrotvoretz [kill list] website.” [As is the author, see [this article](#).]

He spoke of Ukraine’s shelling from 2014, when the people of the Donbass were unarmed and not expecting to be bombed by their own country.

“When the artillery hit the city of Yenakievo, east of Gorlovka, we were defenseless. We went with hunting rifles and torches to fight them. Most of the weapons we had later were captured from them. We had to go to the battlefield without weapons in order to get the weapons.”

When asked if he was concerned that Ukrainian forces might take Donetsk he replied no, of course not, they didn’t succeed in 2014, they won’t now.

When asked whether he had a message for soldiers of the Ukrainian army, Vydra replied without hesitating,

“Go home! We’ve been saying that since 2014: Go home. Unequivocally, we don’t want them here, but we don’t want to kill them. I’m not speaking about nationalists, I’m speaking about Ukrainian soldiers, who are drafted or forcefully employed in the Ukrainian army. Guys, go home, either surrender or go. This is our land. We’re not leaving, we’re not going anywhere.”

I asked how he felt to be treated and described as sub-human, to be called dehumanizing names, a part of the Ukrainian nationalists’ brainwashing propaganda. As [I wrote previously](#):

“Ukrainian nationalists openly declare they view Russians as sub-human. School books [teach this](#) warped ideology. [Videos show](#) the extent of this mentality: Teaching children not only to also hate Russians and see them as not humans, but also brainwashing them to believe killing Donbas residents is acceptable. The [Ukrainian government itself funds](#) neo-Nazi-run indoctrination camps for youths.”

“It’s offensive,” Vydra said, “We are saddened: There are sick people. We need to heal them, slowly.”

I asked whether he thought friendship between Ukrainians and Russians would be possible.

“It will take years for any friendship. Take Chechnya, one region of Russia, it was at war. But slowly, slowly...We must all live together. We are one people.”

Indeed, now Chechen fighters are one of the most effective forces fighting alongside Donbas and Russian soldiers to liberate Donbas areas from Ukrainian forces.

He opened a zippered trousers pocket and proudly brandished a small plastic sleeve containing children’s drawings, also containing icons of saints and Christ, and prayers...

“This is very personal, it’s like my guardian angel. I put it in plastic, I don’t even keep my ID in plastic. I’ve been carrying this one in my pocket since February. I’ve been in all sorts of hot spots. A child drew this, we receive letters from children. It’s very nice to look at them when it’s hard and we are under fire.”

He read one letter:

“We are waiting for you. Thank you for risking your lives to defend Donbas. Yulia and Ira.”

“I don’t even know who are Yulia and Ira,” he said smiling.

Showing the icons, he said, “This is Saint Ushakov, our great commander. This is Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Protector. This Abkhazi icon was given to me by the guys. This is a prayer book. And here is a prayer,” he said of one page prayer.

“These words are to support when times are very hard. When there is heavy shelling, it can go on for hours. So, while you’re sitting there, you can read this.

Especially for the younger guys, 22, 23 years old, just finished college. This is new to them.”

Commanders Speak of Geopolitical Reasons for Ukraine’s War

Outside, sitting in front of an Orthodox banner and a collection of collected munitions—including Western ones—two platoon commanders, “Kabar” and “Kamaz,” spoke of the bigger geopolitical picture. [See [video](#)]

“America is running the show here,” Kabar said. “It builds foreign policy on the basis of how its domestic policy is built, which is through conflicts with external countries. They are accustomed to proving their power to their people through terrorism around the world, inciting fires in Syria, in the east. They played the card of radical Islam there.

And now they are playing the card of fascism. They do not see themselves on the other side of good. They need wars, blood, cruelty, and they signed Europe up for this.

However, they’ve missed one point: Russia, since the days of the Soviet Union, has never retreated in large scale wars. They took Europe and pushed it to slaughter Russia, and they put Russia in such a position that it must secure its national interests. Europe needs to understand this, to pay attention to history, to stop being led by the United States.”

When asked about his feeling regarding Ukrainians, “Kabar” replied similarly to Vydra.



“We don’t blame the whole Ukrainian people. Ukrainians are our friends, they are our relatives. They’ve been struck by evil, and it’s not their fault, ordinary people are not to blame for this. We will liberate them from fascism, we’ll show them brotherhood, and we’ll make friends.”

Image: “Kabar,” a commander of the Pyatnashka fighters. [Source: Photo courtesy of Eva Bartlett]

This is a good opportunity for us to defeat evil. God has honored us with this right to fight evil.”

Kamaz, when asked why he is fighting, replied that this is his homeland, he was born here, and that he has a son who he doesn’t want to inherit Ukraine’s war on the Donbas.

“I myself am Greek by nationality. Ukrainians are Slavs, they are our brothers, their grandfathers fought together shoulder to shoulder with our grandfathers against Nazism and fascism. We are here to finish it, so that our children live a normal happy life. We are fighting for the future.”

He spoke of America’s continuous need for war.

“We’ve seen it in Syria and Yugoslavia, where they destroyed everything and then set everything up their own way, so the people must submit, almost like slaves.”

I asked whether he thought peace between Ukraine and Russia is possible.

“Yes, possibly, why not? But at the moment, the President of Ukraine said there will be no negotiations.

Negotiations are possible, but I think not with this president. When he comes to his senses, he will not be able to negotiate, because he took a lot of money.”

Before leaving the outpost, we chatted a bit with the commanders. A puppy sought the attention of a young soldier. Another puppy ran around our feet. The outpost commanders and soldiers take care of the dogs. Their presence added a somewhat surreal touch to the scene: an outpost which is routinely shelled, where life can cease to exist at any moment, and these happy, well-cared for puppies running around like dogs anywhere.

Western Media Inverted Reality, Lauding Nazis and Demonizing Defenders

While many in the West think that this conflict started in February 2022, those following [events since 2014](#) are aware that, following the Maidan coup and Odessa massacre, and the rise of fascism in Ukraine against the Ukrainian people, the Donbas republics wanted to distance themselves from Ukraine's Nazis and fascism.

The sacrifices which the people of the Donbas republics have endured, particularly those fighting to protect their families and loved ones, have been and continue to be immense.

Just as [the heroes of the Syrian Arab Army](#) were maligned, so too have Donbas forces have been maligned by Western media, though both are defending their homelands from terrorist forces trained and funded by the West. Terrorists given the freedom to commit endless atrocities against Donbas civilians.

These defenders, many living in dank trench conditions didn't choose war, they responded to it, to protect their loved ones and their future. In spite of more than eight years of being warred upon by Ukraine, they retain their humanity.

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Featured image: The author with Pyatnashka commanders at outpost near Avdeevka, Donetsk People's Republic. [Source: Photo courtesy of Eva Bartlett]

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