

Ukrainian Government Bows to Pressure from Washington, EU and Far-right Opposition

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Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych bowed to the demands of the fascistic Western-backed opposition yesterday, signing an agreement curtailing his own powers, allowing the opposition into government, and calling early elections.

This came a day after the bloodiest day of protests in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. At least 77 protesters and riot police were killed and hundreds injured amid street clashes and gun battles between the far-right protesters and the security forces. Fighting has escalated since the Ukrainian parliament voted down an opposition bill to curtail the president's powers earlier this week.

After Thursday's fighting, Yanukovych backed down and gave in to the opposition's key demands. Within 10 days, he will form a national unity government, including opposition representatives. The 2004 constitution passed after the US-backed Orange Revolution is to go back into effect in September, depriving Yanukovych of control over the chiefs of the security services. That power will be held by the prime minister. By December, early presidential and parliamentary elections are to be held; the presidential election was originally scheduled for March of 2015.

Adrian Karatnycky, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank, told the PBS news program in the US that he expected Yanukovych to lose power in a matter of weeks or even days. Yanukovych left Kiev late last night and flew to Kharkov, a city near the border with Russia, the main backer of Yanukovych's regime.

The Ukrainian parliament moved to free jailed billionaire oligarch Yulya Tymoshenko, the rival of Yanukovych who became prime minister in the Orange Revolution. She was convicted in 2011 of embezzlement in connection with natural gas deals with Russia. The parliament decriminalized the article of the criminal code under which Tymoshenko was prosecuted.

Yanukovych signed the agreement after negotiations lasting throughout Thursday night and into Friday, as bloody battles raged on the streets of Kiev. The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland, having arrived in Kiev on Thursday, worked closely with the opposition leaders—Vitali Klitschko of the Udar Party, Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party, and Oleh Tyahnybok of the fascistic Svoboda party.

Signers of the agreement, besides Yanukovych and the three opposition leaders, included Foreign Ministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany, Laurent Fabius of France, and Radoslaw Sikorski of Poland. However, Russian negotiator Vladimir Lukin, who was originally supposed to sign, declined to do so.

Before the agreement was signed, the German and Polish foreign ministers travelled to the Maidan (Independence Square)—the centre of opposition protests, where tens of thousands of mostly middle-class protesters had gathered—in order to obtain the protesters' consent. They met in a hotel with 30 members of the Maidan Council, which represent the protesters.

It appears that even the right-wing opposition leaders were straining to control the far-right thugs unleashed by the imperialist powers in Ukraine. When Klitschko tried to speak to promote the deal with Yanukovich, he was shouted down by the protesters, who called out, "Shame!"

Oleh Tyahnybok, whose Svoboda party openly espouses anti-Semitic and racist views, was received at the German Embassy and presented along with Foreign Minister Steinmeier for a photo opportunity.

Yanukovich's surrender has encouraged the fascistic forces leading the opposition to act even more aggressively. The leader of the neo-Nazi "Right Sector," Dmitry Yarosh, said on the Vkontakte social network that his movement regarded Yanukovich's statement as a "deception" and would continue the fight. "The national revolution continues," he wrote, adding that it would end only when the regime was overthrown.

Washington, while not formally a party to the negotiations, applauded the outcome in Kiev. The White House issued a statement declaring that the Obama administration "welcomes" the agreement, calling it "consistent with what we have advocated."

These statements underscore the utterly reactionary and reckless policy of the imperialist powers, which have worked with fascist groups to drive Ukraine and the entire region to the brink of war. In November last year, Yanukovich cancelled the signing of an association agreement with the European Union (EU) at the last minute and instead moved closer to Russia. Since then, Germany and the United States have systematically sought to destabilize and divide Ukraine.

The US and European press are covering up the fascist politics of the forces they have imposed in government upon the Ukrainian people. The *New York Times* euphemistically refers to the Right Sector as a "hardline nationalist" group. In fact, it is a pro-Nazi group that criticizes Svoboda—itsself a fascist party that celebrates Ukrainians who joined Nazi SS units that carried out mass killings of Jews in the western Ukrainian region of Galicia during World War II—as too "moderate."

Separatist tendencies are raising their heads throughout Ukraine. The western city of Lviv, the centre of Ukrainian nationalism, has declared itself autonomous.

In the southeast, the parliamentary speaker of the Crimean peninsula, which was tacked onto the then-Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954 and is inhabited mainly by Russians, has threatened secession from Ukraine. Speaker Volodymyr Konstantinov said secession "is possible, if the country breaks apart." He added, "And everything is moving towards that."

This also raises the possibility of Russian military intervention in Ukraine. The *Financial Times* of London cited a senior Russian official who said, "If Ukraine breaks apart, it will trigger a war. They will lose Crimea, we will go in and protect it, just as we did in Georgia"—referring to Russia's 2008 war in Georgia after the US-backed Georgian regime attacked Russian peacekeepers in the separatist region of South Ossetia.

Another Russian official told the *Financial Times*, “We will not allow Europe and the US to take Ukraine from us. The states of the former Soviet Union, we are one family. They think Russia is still as weak as in the early 1990s, but we are not.”

Germany, the US and the EU share imperialist and geo-political goals in Ukraine, as a commentary that appeared on *Spiegel Online* two days ago openly noted. “It is no longer just the association agreement with the European Union that is at stake,” Uwe Klußmann wrote. “Nor is the future of President Viktor Yanukovich, a man surrounded by rumours of corruption, the focus any more. Rather, geo-politics has taken centre stage and the question as to which power centres in Europe and the Eurasia region will be dominant in the future has become paramount.”

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