

US-Backed Crackdown Threatens Civil War in Ukraine

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Having received the green light from Washington and the European Union, the Kiev regime launched a bloody crackdown on anti-government protests in eastern Ukraine, threatening to provoke a full-blown civil war that could escalate into a war between the Western powers and Russia.

On Tuesday, government forces attacked and recaptured the Kramatorsk military airfield, which had been occupied by pro-Russian activists. Ukrainian forces were supported by fighter jets and helicopters flying low over the area, which fired on the protests. Russian media reported that at least four occupiers were killed in the operation.

The attackers were confronted with resistance by the local population, most of whom are deeply hostile to the coup regime in Kiev. RIA Novosti reported that hundreds of residents headed to the airfield in Kramatorsk to blockade Ukrainian troops. According to the agency, most of the people were civilians carrying Russian and local flags. A Reuters correspondent in Kramatorsk reported that its inhabitants built barricades against arriving troops, shouting, "Shame! Go back home!"

However, Kiev is sending tanks, armored personnel carriers and heavy artillery to prepare an assault on eastern Ukrainian cities that are effectively under anti-government protesters' control. These include Donetsk, an industrial city of nearly 1 million, Mariupol, (population 460,000), Lugansk, Makiyivka, Khartsyzk, Yevakiyev, Horlivka, Druzhkivka, Kramatorsk and Slovyansk.

The regime is also mobilizing the fascist forces that spearheaded the February 22 coup against the elected president, Victor Yanukovich, to crush anti-government protests. On Tuesday, Andriy Parubiy, head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, announced that a National Guard battalion "comprised of volunteers from Maidan self-defense troops," had left Kiev for the Donetsk region. The "Maidan self-defense troops" that spearheaded the right-wing, pro-European Union protests in Kiev were led by the fascist Right Sector militia.

Washington is fully supporting this military operation backed by fascist thugs, which threatens the lives of countless thousands of civilians in eastern Ukraine.

White House spokesman Jay Carney signaled Washington's support for the crackdown. After cynically declaring that the United States "agreed that the use of force is not a preferred option," he proceeded to endorse the violent attack on protesters. "That said, the Ukrainian government has a responsibility," he declared, "to provide law and order, and these provocations in eastern Ukraine are creating a situation in which the government has to

respond. Ukraine has proceeded with great caution, has for days now been offering amnesty, dialogue, has been trying to resolve these conflicts peacefully.”

Carney made clear that the operation was directly planned and is now being carried out under the auspices of the Obama White House and the Central Intelligence Agency, whose director, John Brennan, traveled to Kiev this past weekend.

Asked what Brennan and other US officials told security forces in Kiev, Carney replied bluntly: “We urged the Ukrainian government to move forward, gradually, responsibly, and with all due caution, as it deals with this situation caused by armed militants... Let’s be clear: the way to ensure that violence does not occur is for these armed paramilitary groups, and these armed so-called pro-Russian separatists, to vacate the buildings and to lay down their arms.”

Carney’s praise of the Kiev regime’s “responsibility” and “due caution” as helicopter gunships were firing on the population and tanks were massing around major cities is a repulsive lie.

General Vasily Krutov—the first deputy head of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), who is leading the operation—summed up the policy Brennan and other US officials undoubtedly discussed with their stooges in Kiev. Krutov threatened to “destroy” anti-government activists, stating: “They must be warned; if they do not lay down their arms, they will be destroyed.”

He denounced protesters as “foreign invaders” and “Russian spies,” adding that another ultimatum for those who had occupied government buildings would be “too humanitarian.”

Krutov indicated that his operation would likely cause massive civilian casualties. “Unfortunately,” he said, “we face a difficult situation because those realizing their plan are hiding behind human shields. Some of them are cynically working toward their own ends, but many are under the influence of propaganda.”

Krutov’s remarks recall the bloody massacres carried out by the political predecessors of his Right Sector allies—the Ukrainian fascists who collaborated with invading Nazi armies during World War II.

The threats of an impending massacre in eastern Ukraine underscore the utter hypocrisy of the Western powers. Washington and its European allies are now supporting and organizing precisely what they accused Yanukovich of doing just weeks ago—mounting a violent crackdown on anti-government protests.

In February, they declared that Yanukovich’s attempts to put down anti-government protests had deprived his regime of legitimacy and justified its overthrow. (They similarly justified the war for regime-change in Libya and the civil war they incited in Syria as a “human rights” response to violent government attacks on protesters).

But while Yanukovich limited his response to anti-government protests to police actions, the US is overseeing the use of attack helicopters and tanks against demonstrators in eastern Ukraine.

US and European support for the crackdown makes clear that their intervention in Ukraine is

not motivated by concerns for Ukrainians' democratic rights. From the outset it has been aimed at inciting a civil war in Ukraine and producing a confrontation with Russia. Having organized a fascist-led coup in Kiev, Washington, Berlin and Brussels are now denouncing the inevitable opposition of people in eastern Ukraine as a Russian plot, and using this lie to escalate the violence.

Typical of the warmongering of the West was the demand by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier that Russia distance itself "from the violent and unlawful actions of pro-Russian demonstrators."

Standing reality on its head, NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen provocatively called on Russia to "de-escalate the crisis, to pull back its troops... to stop destabilizing the situation and make clear it does not support the violent actions of pro-Russian separatists."

US and European officials have produced no evidence to back up their claims that Russia is orchestrating the protests in eastern Ukraine. Asked by reporters if he had evidence of Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine, Rasmussen declared: "We never... comment on intelligence, but I think from what is visible, it is very clear that Russia's hand is deeply engaged in this."

NATO is already deploying more ships and aircraft near Russia's borders and NATO ambassadors will reportedly discuss further measures today "to reinforce the defenses of eastern allies through exercises and temporary deployments of planes and ships sent by other allies."

In his meeting with the EU defence ministers, Rasmussen called for greater cooperation between NATO and the EU. In a provocative move targeting Russia, he proposed that the two organizations' rapid reaction forces hold joint exercises more regularly.

Russia for its part blamed the Western-backed regime and warned of the risk of civil war. "The country is on the brink of a civil war. It's very sad," Medvedev wrote on his Facebook page. He charged that the new authorities had unleashed a wave of violence they could no longer control.

"The illegal rulers are trying to restore the order they cynically trampled on when they participated in an armed uprising," he wrote.

The Russian armed forces are apparently seeking to warn the US military of the implications of its build-up in the region. On Monday, the Pentagon accused a Russian fighter jet of "buzzing" a US Navy destroyer in the Black Sea.

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