

Kiev deploys Neo-Nazi Paramilitary against Political Opponents in Eastern Ukraine

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Global Research, June 28, 2014

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The Ukrainian government is deploying paramilitary groups in close cooperation with the army against opposition in the eastern part of the country. This collaboration has been largely ignored by Western media. While the armed actions of pro-Russian separatists are dealt with at length in the media, there is no discussion of the fascist terror against political opponents of the Kiev regime and the civilian population.

In February, armed groups from the Right Sector and the fascist Svoboda party played a decisive role in the putsch against then-President Viktor Yanukovych. Svoboda was rewarded for this with several ministerial posts and high-ranking positions in the state. Although Svoboda's presidential candidate, Oleh Tyahnybok, received only 1.2 percent of the vote in the May election, Svoboda continues to be prominently represented in the government.

These paramilitary groups operate with the official protection of the state. At the beginning of March, the parliament decided to build a 60,000-man national guard, principally made up of volunteers recruited from the so-called Maidan self-defense groups.

On April 13, Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov released a decree that allows the formation of special units for the purpose of countering separatist currents. Since then, a number of battalions, officially operating under the Ministry of the Interior, have been founded with the financial support of certain oligarchs.

The best-known is the Azov Battalion. The "Black Men," as they have been termed on Russian-language web sites, have played a key role in several of the so-called "anti-terror operations" carried out by the Kiev government.

The Azov Battalion is based in Mariupol and is responsible for the majority of the brutal battles that have taken place there. According to official estimates, between May 10 and May 13 at least 20 people died as a result of violent confrontations in the city on the Azov Sea, whose population is 500,000. Although it is difficult to verify their authenticity, videos on YouTube purport to show that unarmed civilians in the area have been intentionally targeted.

Conflicts have continued in Mariupol. On June 13, the Azov forces, together with the battalion "Ukraine" and special units of the army, stormed the city center, which was held by separatists. In this operation, dozens of separatists were killed and wounded.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has claimed that the Azov Battalion was involved in the storming of the Russian embassy in Kiev.

Members of the battalion regularly boast on Twitter of killing civilians and separatists, giving numbers of alleged victims. Despite the fact that these announcements are not always easy to confirm, they say a great deal about the character of these fascist bands.

At the beginning of June, Yaroslav Honchar, a cofounder of the battalion, was removed from the leadership after he publicly accused the Azov forces of torturing people and stealing property belonging to ex-president Yanukovich's family. According to Honchar, the battalion is largely made up of Right Sector members.

The Azov battalion was founded on May 5 by Oleh Lyashko, a member of parliament representing the ultra-right Radical Party, Igor Kryvoruchko, a leading member of Right Sector, and the well-known fascist Dmitro Korchynsky. According to Wikipedia, the battalion had about 300 members in June.

Many of its members came from the organization "Patriots of Ukraine," which is part of the Right Sector. According to an Al-Jazeera article, the battalion is also affiliated with fascists from Russia, Italy and Sweden. What unifies the fighters is their adherence to National Socialism. New recruits to Azov are trained by the Interior Ministry before they are deployed in eastern Ukraine.

The battalion clearly enjoys the support of Washington and the regime. A YouTube video from Radio Free Europe, which is financed by the US Congress, shows Azov militiamen at a shooting practice.

The pro-government Ukrainian media reports positively about the paramilitary groups and celebrates them as "Heroes of Ukraine." Members of the battalion take every opportunity to declare that they do not view their opponents as people and seek to "destroy" them.

According to accounts in the press, the battalion is financed by the oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi. With a total worth of \$3 billion, Kolomoyskyi was the third richest man in Ukraine in 2012, according to *Forbes*.

The Russian newspaper *Correspondent* estimates his worth at \$6.2 billion. He is a co-owner of Private Bank, the largest bank in Ukraine. He is also one of the biggest operators in the Ukrainian oil, mining and air transport industries. At the beginning of March, Kolomoyskyi was named governor of the eastern Ukrainian state of Dnepropetrovsk.

Kolomoyskyi has politically and financially supported the pro-Western opposition for many years. He was one of the main financiers of the UDAR Party of boxer Vitali Klitschko. Previously, Kolomoyskyi was one of the most important oligarchs behind the opposition politician Yulia Tymoshenko. He also purportedly financed the head of Svoboda, Oleh Tyahnybok, who has, however, denied this in the Ukrainian press.

According to accounts in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Kiev Post*, Kolomoyskyi is behind the "Dnepr" and "Donbass" battalions, which spread terror in eastern Ukraine. These units recruit mainly from fascist organizations and former soldiers.

Dnepropetrovsk has been transformed under Kolomoyskyi into an organizational center of paramilitary forces used by the Kiev regime to combat opposition in the eastern part of the country.

The news agency *Reuters* reports that at the end of May, Kolomoyskyi used several dozen

millions of US dollars to prevent the region from falling into the hands of separatists. With this money, a “National Defense Unit” was built comprising 15,000 men. These included 2,000 battle-ready soldiers divided into four battalions.

Igor Beresa, commander of the National Defense Unit, told *Reuters* that the battalions are accepting formal orders from the Ukrainian army and security forces, although the battalions receive an income twice as high and are better equipped.

Kolomoyskyi’s second-in-command, Boris Filatov, explained to *Reuters*: “We are doing all this in agreement with the central government. We coordinate and cooperate with Kiev. They accept that we are influential as a consolidating factor in the east.”

The Right Sector, which is also active as an independent formation in armed confrontations, shifted its headquarters to Dnipropetrovsk at the end of April. At the time, its leader, Dmitry Yarosh, boasted in an interview with *Spiegel Online*, “Our battalions are part of the new territorial defense. We have good relations with everybody, apart from the police.”

Yarosh regularly posts information about his operation and troops on Facebook and Twitter. At the end of May, the Right Sector assisted the Donbass Battalion in its efforts to take control of the eastern Ukrainian town of Karlivka. The village is still under siege.

There can be no doubt that the fascist battalions are responsible for a considerable proportion of the casualties of the civil war in Ukraine. According to United Nations reports, since May 7 alone, a total of 356 people in eastern Ukraine have been killed. The vast majority, 257, were civilians.

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