

Ukraine: The War on Democracy

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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In February, a small but heavily armed paramilitary force, comprised of street gangs who adhere to an extreme right wing ideology, launched a coup against the elected President of an impoverished country. During their rampage through the streets of the capital, the belligerent forces intimidated opponents, attacked and murdered police trying to maintain order, and executed unarmed civilians with sniper rifles. Their aim: to provoke security forces into launching a crackdown in order to create an atmosphere of confusion and panic to further destabilise an already volatile government.

In the weeks leading up to February's violence, relatively peaceful protests took place in the nation's capital against the elected President. These protests, for the most part led by the pro-Western middle class, were initially instigated in response to the President's refusal to accept an offer that would forge closer ties with wealthy Western nations but would also open up his country's resources for plunder by the free market. The protests were naturally heavily encouraged by those nations, including the US, hungry for access to cheap resources.

After weeks of open air demonstrations, during which time senior US politicians were filmed visiting the main protest camp and exhorting demonstrators to continue pressuring their government to accept the deal on the table, the President agreed to meet with opposition leaders to try to reach an agreement to end the impasse.

When the possibility of a resolution, and the wane of the protests calling for the President's resignation, emerged, paramilitary forces who had hitherto been on the fringes of the protest movement mobilised with surprisingly rapid speed and unleashed their reign of terror.

Scores of civilians and police were killed and within days the President had fled to a neighbouring country. Meanwhile a junta, comprising some of the nation's richest men, took control with the support of the paramilitary forces who marched through the streets intimidating and attacking anyone opposed to the coup d'état and issuing threats to ethnic and religious minorities.

Following the putsch, two provinces in the east of the country, where the intimidated minority groups are concentrated and where a large proportion of the country's heavy industry and natural resources are located, refused to accept the rule of the junta whom they deemed a direct threat to their safety.

In response, the leaders of the coup sent the army to pacify the eastern regions. However, they did not anticipate mass discontent within the armed forces. Many soldiers as officers refused to follow commands issued by an unelected leadership, especially one that ordered

them to fire at their own countrymen and women. Some soldiers even surrendered their weapons to the local populace or decided to throw in their lot with newly formed self defence units. Faced with unprecedented mass insubordination, the unelected kleptocrats sent the above mentioned paramilitary forces to wreck havoc in the east of the country. Additionally, a new unit called the National Guard, was formed from amongst these fascists, criminals, mercenaries and others loyal to the new regime.

These far right militias eagerly set about unleashing violence. On one occasion, in early May, they reportedly forcing anti-junta protesters into a local trade union building before setting it alight. Those who tried to escape were shot and later a video appeared online supposedly showing a pregnant women who had been strangled with a power cord alongside the caption: *'Mama got whacked'*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx_vvZ5LwHs

Although dozens were killed, in reference to the massacre, an MP from one of the far right political parties supporting the violence wrote ["Let the demons burn in hell" on her Facebook page -](#)

In the days that followed the massacre, fighter jets and rocket launcher systems were used to destroy public buildings and kill civilians. A hospital was shelled and water pumps were damaged, increasing the risk of outbreaks of water borne viruses. Vehicles evacuating wounded resistance fighters were also reportedly attacked by the regime's superior forces.

To give the putsch a veneer of legitimacy, elections were held on the 25th May. Widespread intimidation and violence against voters and election candidates was reported. Members of the opposition Communist Party were attacked and buildings belonging to the Communist Party were torched by far right gangs. There were reports of a variety of opposition candidates withdrawing from the election in protest.

So where did this coup d'état followed by atrocities against a civilian population take place? You would be forgiven for envisaging an impoverished nation in the heart of Africa, a small South American nation or a resource rich Middle Eastern country. The above events occurred in Europe - in Ukraine - on the borders of the European Union.

The protests and violence took place in Kiev and the resource rich eastern provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk, where many ethnic minority Russians reside, have come under attack from paramilitary forces that take inspiration from militias that collaborated with and fought alongside the Nazis. On account of their desire for autonomy from the new regime, the people in the east of Ukraine have come under attack from these paramilitaries as well as aircraft and artillery.

The victor of 'elections' held at the end of May was one of Ukraine's richest men. He immediately promised to intensify attacks on the "bandits" in the east of Ukraine. President Petro Poroshenko attended his inauguration on the 7th June surrounded by sycophants, domestic and international, who had come to pay homage to his 'victory' whilst military aircraft and rocket launcher systems pummelled both civilian and resistance forces in the Donetsk and Lugansk and a politician from the separatist Donetsk regional government was assassinated in a drive by shooting.

Poroshenko has at separate times been both an ally of both former President Victor

Yushenko (of the Orange coup fame in 2004) and as well as ousted President Victor Yanukovich. He served as a minister in both the Yushenko and Yanukovich administrations and is clearly seasoned at switching sides when it suits him. Poroshenko's estimated \$1 billion fortune was accumulated in the period after the USSR collapsed. He would buy up state enterprises at a knockdown price before cutting the workforce and slashing pay and conditions. Many modern day oligarchs, in both Ukraine and Russia, made their fortunes in years after 1991 as wealth trickled up from the state and citizens into their pockets.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has shackled Greece into being a debtocracy, now has its eyes on [Ukraine and has promised a \\$17 billion bailout](#) in exchange for implementing harsh economic policies.

Poroshenko will likely implement the anti-social measures advocated by the IMF, further impoverishing Ukraine and adding to the already existing social ills as he leads the country towards economic disaster.

In her book *The Shock Doctrine*, Canadian author and social activist, Naomi Klein, describes a set pattern repeated in most Latin American countries at differing times between the 1960s and the 1980s. A military coup, facilitated on almost every occasion by the US, and subsequent repression against dissenting elements of the population would swiftly be followed by 'economic shock therapy' whereby neo-liberal ideology would be evoked to privatise and asset strip the public sector. A small proportion of this looted wealth would be appropriated by the ruling junta and its allies, whereas the lion's share would be snatched by multinational companies with close ties to the US government. Ukraine thus far seems to be following the same 'Shock Doctrine' blueprint.

Due to the refusal of the Ukrainian army to take orders from the Kiev cabal and facing stiff resistance from self defence forces in Donetsk and Lugansk, Poroshenko and his allies are increasingly forced to rely on gangs of paramilitary forces which include unashamed neo-Nazi elements to implement their own version of the Shock Doctrine. Svoboda, the Right Sector, the National Guard and the newly formed Azov battalion (a special group of 70 volunteers known as the "Men in Black" and one of a number of paramilitary units recently created by the forces in Kiev) comprise individuals who are the ideological heirs of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera.

The Svoboda movement (until 2004 called the Socialist-Nationalist Party of Ukraine) is descended from Stepan Bandera's Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists which fought alongside Hitler's forces after the invasion of the USSR in 1941 and was responsible for mass exterminations of civilians. At that time, Bandera issued a manifesto which stated "Moskali [Ukrainian slang for Russians], Poles, and Jews are hostile to us and must be exterminated in this struggle." Many of Svoboda's current members had fathers and grandfathers who fought in Bandera's organisation.

In the wake of the February coup, these paramilitaries started to issue threats towards Jewish and Russian minorities residing in Ukraine. Now they are actively playing the role of death squads in the east of the country. The people of Donetsk and Lugansk were forced to organise themselves into self defence groups to prevent further massacres. Despite overwhelming odds, they have bravely resisted the paramilitary incursions. Their stiff resistance to forces of fascism deserves the commendation and solidarity of all anti-fascists, socialists and progressives worldwide.

On several occasions, these resistance forces have checked the advance of forces loyal to Kiev. Recent blows include shooting down a helicopter at the end of May that killed an army general loyal to the Kiev and 11 of his soldiers. More recently, on Saturday 14th June, a military plane [was shot down over the separatist regions resulting in 49 casualties.](#)

Clearly, the Poroshenko regime's eastward incursion is no walk in the park

Civilians caught in the clashes are suffering greatly. On the 8th/9th June, the Ukrainian airforce was reported to be bombing Slavyansk and a few days earlier an airstrike on a government building in Lugansk killed eight. There are also reports that civilians are fleeing to seek shelter in across the border in Russia.

A significant portion of the Western media, even the Guardian, describe the resistance forces in Donetsk and Lugansk as 'pro-Russian forces'. This is a misnomer that propagates the myth of Russian involvement in the conflict. Despite the secessionist forces in Donetsk and Lugansk hoping for Russian support, such support has not been forthcoming. Putin, a shrewd political player and a capitalist, recognises the enormous cost (political and economic) of allowing the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk to join the Russian Federation.

It is quite plausible that Russian agents are on the ground in eastern Ukraine provinces but they are likely dwarfed by the number of FBI and CIA advisors assisting the regime in Kiev. <http://www.countercurrents.org/cc060514.htm>

Recently the United States, fully involved in funding and supporting the February coup, promised to give Ukraine \$1 billion dollars in aid.

Much of what is taking place in Ukraine will not be covered by the mainstream media. A good source of up to date information and video footage seems to be certain Facebook groups such as '*Donbass Revolution*' or *Noworosja Doniecka Republika Ludowa*. (The information posted on the latter Facebook group is mostly in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian).

Speaking personally, whilst keeping a close eye on events unfolding in Ukraine, it was impossible not to feel sorrow and anger at seeing neo-Nazi forces being unleashed against a civilian population in Eastern Europe for the first time since 1945. I found myself wishing for the formation of an International Brigade, as occurred during the Spanish civil war, to help the resistance in the east of Ukraine fight their superior foe.

Of course, the logistical difficulties of such an action, at this stage, are immeasurable. Presently, other courses of action are more suitable. Perhaps there is a role for UN peacekeepers to shield civilians from attack.

The people of eastern Ukraine who are fighting for their self determination deserve support. Only they can choose their destiny and neither Washington, Kiev nor Moscow ought to have a say in the matter.

It is reassuring to see that groups have been formed in the UK to build links with the labour movement in Ukraine and support the right of the Ukrainian people, in any part of the country, to determine their own future free from either Western or Eastern imperialism. One such group, the Ukrainian Socialist Solidarity Campaign, was formed a couple of weeks ago by the Labour Representation Committee whilst the '[Solidarity with the Antifascist Resistance in Ukraine](#)' campaign was launched by the Marxist Student Federation in SOAS earlier this month. <http://l-r-c.org.uk/news/story/crisis-in-ukraine/>

Thought could also be given to lobbying our governments to cut ties with and place sanctions on the Poroshenko administration if it does not cease military action against civilians. Protests outside Ukrainian embassies could be considered too. However, a crucial act must be to lobby for the cancellation of 'Rapid Trident', a annual NATO training exercise (involving British forces) that is planned to take place on Ukrainian soil in July.

Although the US Army in Europe (USAREUR) website at <http://www.eur.army.mil/RapidTrident/> states that the purpose of 'Rapid Trident' is to "promote regional stability and security, strengthen partnership capacity, and foster trust while improving interoperability between USAREUR, the land forces of Ukraine, and ... NATO partner nations", in reality such foolhardiness may trigger a new cold war between East and West.

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