

Ukraine's 'Romantic' Nazi Storm Troopers

By [Robert Parry](#)

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While most civilized people view the Swastika and other Nazi symbols as abhorrent reminders of unspeakable evil, the Washington Post trotted out a new way of seeing them – as “romantic” – a sign that apologists for Ukraine’s coup regime know no limits.

The U.S. mainstream media’s deeply biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis – endlessly portraying the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev as “the good guys” – reached a new level of absurdity over the weekend as the Washington Post excused the appearance of Swastikas and other Nazi symbols among a Ukrainian government militia as “romantic.”

This curious description of these symbols for unspeakable evil – the human devastation of the Holocaust and World War II — can be found in the last three paragraphs of [the lead story](#) in the Post’s Saturday editions, an article about Ukraine’s Azov battalion which has become best known for waging brutal warfare under Nazi and neo-Nazi insignia.



Image, right: Nazi symbols on helmets worn by members of Ukraine’s Azov battalion. (Images filmed by a Norwegian camera team and shown on German TV)

However, if you didn’t know that reputation, you would have learned little about that grim feature of the Azov paramilitaries as you wound your way through the long story which began on Page One and covered half an inside page.

Post correspondent Anthony Faiola portrayed the Azov fighters as “battle-scarred patriots” who were nobly resisting “Russian aggression,” so determined to fight for Ukraine’s freedom that they threatened to resort to “guerrilla war.”

The article finds nothing objectionable about Azov’s plans for “sabotage, targeted assassinations and other insurgent tactics” against Russians, although such actions are often regarded as terrorism. Similar threats are directed even at the government of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko if he agrees to a peace deal with the ethnic Russian east that is not to the militia’s liking.

“If Kiev reaches a deal with rebels that they don’t support, paramilitary fighters say they could potentially strike pro-Russian targets on their own — or even turn on the government itself,” the article states.

Incorruptible Freedom Fighters

The Post, which has avidly supported a Cold War-style confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, portrays Kiev's so-called "voluntary battalions" as the true heroes of this international morality play, incorruptible freedom fighters angry about a potential sell-out by Poroshenko and other politicians far from the front lines.

So, you might have been a little unsettled to reach the inside jump of the story and see a photograph of a Swastika festooning one barracks of the Azov brigade. According to a variety of other news accounts, the Azov brigade also marches under the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel banner, a slight variant of a symbol used by the Nazi SS.

But the Post offers an excuse for the Swastika in the barracks. In the last three paragraphs, Faiola reported: "One platoon leader, who called himself Kirt, conceded that the group's far right views had attracted about two dozen foreign fighters from around Europe.

"In one room, a recruit had emblazoned a swastika above his bed. But Kirt, a former hospitality worker, dismissed questions of ideology, saying that the volunteers — many of them still teenagers — embrace symbols and espouse extremist notions as part of some kind of 'romantic' idea.

"He insisted the group's primary goal is defending its country against Russian aggression."

Yet, whatever excuses the Post and other Western media offer – or how much they try to downplay the key role played by neo-Nazi militias in the U.S.-backed Kiev regime – the ugly reality is that Nazism, deeply rooted in western Ukraine since World War II, has been an integral part of the story since the crisis erupted last winter.

The putsch that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovych was spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias trained in western Ukraine, organized in 100-man brigades and dispatched to Kiev where they became the muscle behind the increasingly violent Maidan protests. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Discovers Ukraine's Neo-Nazis at War.](#)"]

Empowering the Nazis

On Feb. 21, Yanukovych agreed to set early elections (in a deal brokered by three European nations) and pulled back the police (at the request of U.S. officials). The next day, the neo-Nazi bands seized government offices and forced Yanukovych's loyalists to flee for their lives. Far-right parties were then rewarded with four or more ministries in the new regime, including national security.

Neo-Nazi leader Andriy Parubiy, who was commander of the Maidan "self-defense forces," was elevated to national security chief and soon announced that the Maidan militia forces would be incorporated into the National Guard and sent to eastern Ukraine to attack ethnic Russians who had refused to accept the coup regime that replaced Yanukovych.

As the U.S. government and media cheered this "anti-terrorist operation," the neo-Nazi and other right-wing battalions waged brutal street fighting as territory was gradually reclaimed from the Russian ethnic rebels.

Only occasionally did the nasty reality slip into the major U.S. news media, often – as with the Post on Saturday – relegated to the last few paragraphs of long stories. For instance, an Aug. 10 [article](#) in the New York Times mentioned the neo-Nazi paramilitaries at the end of a lengthy story on another topic.

“The fighting for Donetsk has taken on a lethal pattern: The regular army bombards separatist positions from afar, followed by chaotic, violent assaults by some of the half-dozen or so paramilitary groups surrounding Donetsk who are willing to plunge into urban combat,” the Times reported.

“Officials in Kiev say the militias and the army coordinate their actions, but the militias, which count about 7,000 fighters, are angry and, at times, uncontrollable. One known as Azov, which took over the village of Marinka, flies a neo-Nazi symbol resembling a Swastika as its flag.”

The conservative London Telegraph offered more details about the Azov battalion in [an article](#) by correspondent Tom Parfitt, who wrote: “Kiev’s use of volunteer paramilitaries to stamp out the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk ‘people’s republics’... should send a shiver down Europe’s spine.

“Recently formed battalions such as Donbas, Dnipro and Azov, with several thousand men under their command, are officially under the control of the interior ministry but their financing is murky, their training inadequate and their ideology often alarming. The Azov men use the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel (Wolf’s Hook) symbol on their banner and members of the battalion are openly white supremacists, or anti-Semites.”

Based on interviews with militia members, the Telegraph reported that some of the fighters doubted the Holocaust, expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler and acknowledged that they are indeed Nazis.

Andriy Biletsky, the Azov commander, “is also head of an extremist Ukrainian group called the Social National Assembly,” according to the Telegraph article which quoted a recent commentary by Biletsky as declaring: “The historic mission of our nation in this critical moment is to lead the White Races of the world in a final crusade for their survival. A crusade against the Semite-led Untermenschen.”

Nazis Knowingly Dispatched

In other words, for the first time since World War II, a government had dispatched Nazi storm troopers to attack a European population – and officials in Kiev knew what they were doing.

The Telegraph questioned Ukrainian authorities in Kiev who acknowledged that they were aware of the extremist ideologies of some militias but insisted that the higher priority was having troops who were strongly motivated to fight. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[Ignoring Ukraine’s Neo-Nazi Storm Troopers](#).”]

But a rebel counteroffensive by ethnic Russians last month reversed many of Kiev’s gains and drove the Azov and other government forces back to the port city of Mariupol, where Foreign Policy’s reporter Alec Luhn also encountered these neo-Nazis. He [wrote](#):

"Blue and yellow Ukrainian flags fly over Mariupol's burned-out city administration building and at military checkpoints around the city, but at a sport school near a huge metallurgical plant, another symbol is just as prominent: the [wolfsangel](#) ('wolf trap') symbol that was widely used in the Third Reich and has been adopted by neo-Nazi groups. ...

"Pro-Russian forces have said they are fighting against Ukrainian nationalists and 'fascists' in the conflict, and in the case of Azov and other battalions, these claims are essentially true." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Seeing No Neo-Nazi Militias in Ukraine](#)."]

Over the past several days, more evidence emerged about the presence of Nazis in the ranks of Ukrainian government fighters. Germans were shocked to see video of Azov militia soldiers decorating their gear with the Swastika and the "SS rune."

NBC News [reported](#) last week: "Germans were confronted with images of their country's dark past on Monday night, when German public broadcaster ZDF showed video of Ukrainian soldiers with Nazi symbols on their helmets in its evening newscast.

"The video was shot ... in Ukraine by a camera team from Norwegian broadcaster TV2. 'We were filming a report about Ukraine's AZOV battalion in the eastern city of Urzuf, when we came across these soldiers,' Oysten Bogen, a correspondent for the private television station, told NBC News.

"Minutes before the images were taped, Bogen said he had asked a spokesperson whether the battalion had fascist tendencies. 'The reply was: absolutely not, we are just Ukrainian nationalists,' Bogen said."

You might think it's an extraordinary fact that a U.S.-backed government in 2014 has dispatched neo-Nazi storm troopers to lead street fighting in Ukrainian cities where seven decades ago the Nazi SS and its Ukrainian adjunct, the Galician SS, slaughtered Poles, Jews and Russians.

But it's an unpleasant fact that the U.S. media would prefer to ignore. When it does get mentioned it is typically buried deep in an article or surrounded by excuses, such as the Post's novel idea that the Nazi Swastika is "romantic."

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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