

US, NATO Support the Ukrainian Army's Bloody Offensive

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The brutal offensive by the Ukrainian army against the major cities in the east of the country threatens an all-out military confrontation with Russia. After NATO warned of a Russian invasion in east Ukraine on Wednesday, its secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen traveled to Kiev on Thursday to speak with President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk to offer the government support.

The discussions with the prime minister looked at ways in which planned NATO financial aid could be used to strengthen the Ukrainian military in the areas of command, communication, and cyber defence capabilities, the government declared on their website. "NATO stands ready to support Ukraine," Rasmussen told a news conference.

Poroshenko awarded the NATO chief the highest award of the Ukrainian state for foreigners, the Order of Freedom: "Over the years you have been and now remain a friend of Ukraine, and we hope the development of our cooperation with NATO is the key to the success of our reforms, security and territorial integrity."

US President Barack Obama said at a press conference that his administration would endeavor to support the Kiev regime, "We have a whole package of support ready for the Ukrainian government and its army." He continued, "We will continue to work with them, week after week, day after day, evaluating what they need specifically so that they can protect their country." He ruled out directly supplying weapons for the moment.

US Vice President Joe Biden also assured Poroshenko of support in a phone call, according to the Ukrainian presidency's web site.

The US Navy has meanwhile announced that the missile cruiser Vella Gulf had entered the Black Sea on Thursday. "The cruiser's mission is to improve operational cooperation in the work on the fulfillment of shared objectives, as well as holding the United States to the strengthening of the collective security of NATO allies and partners in the region," it said. The ship is 173 meters long and houses a 400-member crew, and is equipped with, among other things, surface to air missiles and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

In a phone call on Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to use his influence on the pro-Russian separatists to get them to agree to a ceasefire. In the last week, the EU has agreed to harsh economic sanctions against Russia.

Russia has now responded with its own trade measures. Moscow has published a list of goods whose importation is now prohibited from countries against which sanctions have been imposed. These include beef, pork, fruit, vegetables, cheese and milk products.

On Thursday, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev also announced an overflight ban for Ukrainian airlines. He also threatened to extend the ban to companies in the US and the EU, saying, "The Russian government is considering response measures [...] Including considering a ban on transit flights of European and American airlines to East Asia."

The official representative of the European Commission in Germany, the Austrian Richard Kühnel, said in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* that Europe would "tighten the screws" if Russia does not change its policy. Given the possible closure of airspace, the EU could in turn impose further sanctions, according to the "eye for an eye" principle, Kühnel said.

At the same time, the Ukrainian army has continued its attacks on the separatist-controlled east Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. On Thursday, the Donetsk City Council reported that a dental clinic was severely damaged by a mortar attack; one patient was killed and five others injured.

According to the city council, on Wednesday night three more civilians were killed in the shelling of residential areas in Donetsk. Previously, a hospital had been attacked in the city of Slovyansk; two employees were killed. Heavy fighting in the region has also been reported from other cities. According to the local authorities, in Gorlowka in the past few days, 33 civilians were killed and 129 were injured as a result of artillery fire.

Fighting has also been reported from the area in which the Malaysian passenger plane MH17 crashed under unexplained circumstances. The Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said on Wednesday night that the rescue operations had to be interrupted at the crash site due to continued fighting. The Ukrainian government subsequently announced a ceasefire covering the crash site. Separatists expressed concerns that evidence of the circumstances of the accident will be destroyed in this way.

Amnesty International released a report on Wednesday concerning serious human rights violations in the areas re-conquered by the Ukrainian army. The parliamentarian and president of the Radical Party, Oleg Lyashko, is traveling throughout the country with paramilitary units, "detaining—in effect abducting—and ill-treating individuals," said the organization. These abuses of opposition figures were recorded on video by Lyashko and displayed on his website.

Given the opposition to the government throughout the country, conflicts are growing within the Kiev regime. On Thursday, the secretary of the Council for National Security and Defence of Ukraine, Andriy Parubiy, announced his resignation, which was accepted immediately by Poroshenko.

Parubiy was co-founder of the fascist Social National Party of Ukraine, the forerunner of today's Svoboda Party. He led the armed "self-defence forces" of the Maidan.

Parubiy gave no reasons for his resignation. But there have been speculation about conflicts between him and the president. The army is said to have suffered greater losses during fighting in eastern Ukraine than previously admitted.

At the same time, there were violent clashes between police and right-wing demonstrators

on the Maidan in Kiev, as security forces tried to remove barricades erected by the demonstrators.

In February, the Maidan was the origin of the armed coup that brought down the elected President Viktor Yanukovich, bringing the new regime to power. A few hundred protesters have continued to occupy a tent camp on the square and also occupy some government buildings, demanding new elections and a clamp down on the separatists in the east.

With its action against the right-wing protesters, the government wants to consolidate the state apparatus and bring it to bear against massive popular opposition.

Among working people, opposition is growing against conscription for military service. Protests by mothers in many cities are accompanied by a growing boycott of the call up.

Newspapers report that in Lutsk, the capital of the district of Volhynia, only half of the men conscripted attended the call up. Postal delivery workers report that many citizens refuse to accept official letters.

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