

Kiev regime orders crackdown as US steps up threats against Moscow

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Vice President Joseph Biden's two-day visit to Ukraine has ended with a resumption of the Kiev regime's military crackdown against its political opponents in the southeast of the country and a dangerous escalation of US threats against Russia.

Oleksandr Turchynov, who is both acting president and chairman of the parliament following the US-backed, fascist-led coup of February 22, announced Tuesday that he had ordered the country's security forces to "carry out effective counterterrorist activities aimed at defending Ukrainian citizens living in the country's east from terrorists."

Troops have reportedly been massed in the town of Izyum, on the border between Ukraine's Kharkov region and Donetsk, the country's most industrialized region. Donetsk has been the center of protests against the US-backed ultranationalists who seized power in Kiev.

Government buildings and police stations have been seized in over a dozen cities and towns. Local councils that have been elected are demanding autonomy for the region and a federalized form of government. In Lugansk, a local popular assembly has announced it will hold a two-stage referendum on May 11 and May 18, asking voters whether the region should be autonomous in the first round and, in the second, whether it should be independent or seek annexation by Russia. Other areas are preparing similar votes.

Izyum is about 50 kilometers northeast of Slavyansk, a center of the protests in Donetsk. The troops that have been deployed there reportedly include National Guard units that are heavily populated by fascist thugs from the Right Sector.

The Kiev regime initially launched its "antiterrorist" offensive early last week, seizing control of a military airfield in Kramatorsk and sending an armored column rolling toward Slavyansk. Halted by a crowd of local people, however, the Ukrainian soldiers refused to take action against them, instead turning over their armored vehicles and weapons to anti-Kiev militiamen.

It was in the aftermath of this humiliating fiasco that the Ukrainian regime's foreign minister joined his counterparts from the US, Russia and the European Union in drafting an

agreement in Geneva to halt all violence and de-escalate tensions by disarming illegal groups, ending occupations of public buildings and spaces, freeing political prisoners and initiating a dialogue between the regions.

Shortly afterwards, the regime in Kiev added that it was observing an "Easter truce." It was during this supposed truce that a column of four cars carrying Right Sector gunmen attacked a roadblock on the outskirts of Slavyansk on Easter Sunday, killing three local men.

It is now apparent that the Kiev regime and its patrons in Washington were only playing for time with the negotiations in Geneva. It hardly seems a coincidence that the first abortive "counterterrorist" offensive was launched after a secret visit to Kiev by CIA Director John Brennan, while the second attempt was initiated immediately after Vice President Biden's trip to the country.

Turchynov claimed the resumption of the crackdown was triggered by the discovery in Slavyansk of the body of a local politician and member of his own right-wing Batkivshchyna, or "Fatherland," party, who had been abducted earlier. Another body found in the town has yet to be identified. Turchynov charged that "these crimes are being committed with the full support and connivance" of Russia.

This is all merely a pretext for an aggressive operation planned and directed from Washington. This was made clear in an interview published by the *Washington Post* Tuesday with the Kiev regime's minister of internal affairs, Arsen Avakov. Asked by the *Post* whether the regime was going "to fight the terrorists," Avakov replied, "Tomorrow the holidays will be finished and the announced Easter truce will be finished... We will act... We will start liberating people from the terrorists."

The US-backed crackdown against the population of southeastern Ukraine threatens to plunge the country into a bloody civil war. At the same time, the launching of such an operation within miles of the Russian border poses the immediate threat of a catastrophic conflict between a nuclear-armed Russia and the Western powers.

In tandem with the turn toward armed repression in Ukraine, Washington is escalating its reckless and provocative military actions in the region directed against Russia. The Pentagon announced Tuesday that a first contingent of US paratroopers will arrive in Poland today to begin months of joint infantry exercises with Polish troops. Similar company-sized units will be dispatched to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the coming days in what the US military describes as “land force training activities in the Baltic region scheduled to take place this year and possibly into next year.”

“Russia’s aggression in Ukraine has renewed our resolve to strengthening NATO’s defense plans and capabilities, and to demonstrate our continued commitment to collective defense in reinforcing our NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe,” Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said.

Also announced was the dispatch of another warship to the Black Sea in what is being described as a “reassurance mission.”

This supposed response only points to the real motivation behind the US-backed coup in Ukraine: to escalate the military encirclement of Russia, bringing NATO to its borders and eliminating Moscow as an impediment to US geostrategic hegemony over the Eurasian landmass.

Victoria Nuland, the US undersecretary of state for Eurasian affairs and the designated “point person” on operations in Ukraine, made clear the scale of the US investment in the drive to impose a US puppet regime in Kiev in an interview Monday on CNN news.

Nuland is a former chief of staff to Dick Cheney and the wife of Robert Kagan, the founding chairman of the Project for a New American Century, the rightwing think tank that was the leading advocate for wars for regime change in Iraq and elsewhere. She boasted to CNN’s Christiane Amanpour that since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Washington has “invested” \$5 billion in promoting “democracy” in Ukraine. She followed this admission with the preposterous claim that no US aid had been funneled to the fascist-led violence in Kiev’s Maidan, which she described as “a spontaneous movement.”

Nuland concluded by issuing marching orders to the Kiev regime, insisting that it must “negotiate a deal with the IMF, where they would institute real reform,” i.e., austerity measures that will spell mass unemployment and a devastating decline in living standards for Ukrainian workers. She also affirmed Washington’s backing for elections being staged by the illegitimate regime in Kiev on May 25 and demanded that the regime “ensure that the country is peaceful enough for those elections to go forward.” This was a clear directive to launch bloody

repression against those in southeastern Ukraine who have opposed the US-orchestrated coup.

Moscow responded to the latest US threats and provocations in a Tuesday telephone conversation between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry that had been initiated from Washington. Lavrov insisted that the US-backed Ukrainian regime had to take “urgent steps” to implement the April 17 agreement reached in Geneva. This meant reversing the order to send troops into southeastern Ukraine and freeing dissidents arrested there. He also demanded that the regime disarm neo-fascist groups such as the Right Sector.

What has become clear is that while Russia’s regime, representing the interests of the country’s capitalist oligarchs, hoped that Geneva could prove a path to peaceful accommodation with US imperialism, Washington saw the agreement as a means to an entirely different end. It used it to gain time to reorganize a military crackdown in Ukraine, while at the same time claiming that Russia was in violation of the deal because of the refusal of the opponents of the Kiev regime in southeastern Ukraine to halt their protests. This provides the pretext for intensified sanctions and stepped-up military provocations against Moscow.

As for disarming the Right Sector, neither Washington nor its puppets in Kiev had the intention of doing any such thing. They recognize the need to use these fascist elements as a battering ram against not only the anti-Kiev protests, but also against resistance from the working class as a whole to the drastic IMF-dictated social and economic attacks that are to come.



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