

Despite round table talks, Ukrainian regime escalates crackdown

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16 May 2014

The United States and Europe signaled their support for the Kiev regime's "antiterror" operations to crush pro-Russian protesters in eastern Ukraine, even as the Kremlin indicated its support for so-called "round table" talks on Wednesday in Kiev and distanced itself from the protesters.

On Thursday, Ukraine's acting President Oleksandr Turchynov boasted that the Ukrainian army had destroyed pro-Russian fighters' bases in overnight operations. He claimed that regime forces attacked a base in the eastern city of Slavyansk and another near Kramatorsk—the industrial city in the north of Donetsk province where Kiev's so-called "antiterror operation" began a month ago. The defense ministry in Kiev announced that the army took three prisoners, claiming that there were no casualties.

The Kiev regime is increasingly relying on the fascist forces that spearheaded the February 22 coup against the elected president, Victor Yanukovych, to continue its operations in the east.

On Thursday, the British *Guardian* published a long article, titled "Ukraine civil war fears mount as volunteer units take up arms," reporting that "irregular units are springing up as Kiev struggles to wrest back control of Donetsk and Luhansk regions from the grip of pro-Russia fighters. They have been given semi-legitimacy by the Ukrainian authorities, grateful for any help they can get in their fight in the east."

The danger of an all-out civil war in Ukraine is not the result of an alleged "Russian plot," as the Western governments and media claim. The imperialist powers and its stooges in Kiev have a deliberate policy of inflaming ethnic and cultural tensions to destabilize Ukraine and advance their geostrategic interests against Russia.

A six-year-old diplomatic cable written by then-US

ambassador to Russia William Burns and recently published by WikiLeaks reads like a blueprint for the current events.

"NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains 'an emotional and neuralgic' issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene," Burns wrote.

As the cable makes clear, the US and its European allies, including Germany, knew that the installation of a pro-European and pro-NATO government in Kiev would provoke opposition both inside Ukraine and from Russia. This response—which has taken the form of a separatist rebellion in the east, and the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation—is now being used as a pretext for a stepped-up imperialist offensive against Russia.

As the "round table" talks were underway, US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, speaking at a security conference in Bratislava, threatened that "if the May 25th elections don't go forward, if Russia continues to destabilize...there will be further, deeper and, now, sectoral economic sanctions on Russia... And we do believe what we have already done is starting to bite."

European Council President Herman Van Rompuy announced at a joint news conference with Georgian Prime Minister Irakly Garibashvili that Georgia and Moldova would sign European Union association agreements on June 27. EU moves to directly ally with two other former Soviet Republics that border on Russia—one of which, Georgia, attacked Russian forces

in 2008, leading to a brief war with Russia—highlights the reckless character of the imperialist offensive to encircle and ultimately dismember Russia.

On Thursday, Washington indicated that NATO plans to open permanent military bases in Poland. “The US is aware of the Polish desire to deploy NATO military bases in the country, and I think it is crucial to consider this initiative,” US Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull said.

“It’s not just the United States, but the entire alliance. This is an important topic for discussion, which will take place in the UK in September. If Russia so radically changes the atmosphere of security in this part of Europe, it requires a certain response from NATO,” he threatened.

Mull also stated that the US will keep the additional forces it sent to Poland in recent weeks at least until the end of 2014. During the past weeks, the US deployed twelve US F-16 fighter jets and about 450 troops to Poland, as part of a massive NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe.

These measures expose the fraud of the so-called “round table” talks held under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). They have been initiated to contain the rebellion in the east and push through presidential elections on May 25, which are seen as key to lending a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the unpopular Western puppet regime in Kiev.

The first round table lasted only three hours, however. They were attended by leading figures of the putschist government, oligarchs, former Ukrainian presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, regional leaders, religious figures, leading OSCE personnel, and the US and German ambassadors to Ukraine.

The talks included repeated threats against Russia and the antigovernment protesters in the east. They were also driven, however, by the fear that opposition to the Kiev regime could get out of control and turn into a full-scale civil war or spark a social explosion throughout the country.

Officials from eastern Ukraine who attended the talks warned that there was massive popular opposition in the east to the government in Kiev. Sergei Taruta, a billionaire oligarch appointed governor of Donetsk by the Kiev regime, said: “The majority of Donbass [the

Donetsk basin’s] population is for Ukraine’s unity, but at the same time against the current authorities in Kiev.”

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman appealed to all participants “to meet the challenges we have today,” warning that “nobody will give us a second chance. We will either win back the trust of the people in the east and west, or we will suffer a bad fate.”

These concerns are shared by the Putin regime, which represents the oligarchic elite that—in Russia as well as in Ukraine—amassed incredible fortunes by looting formerly nationalized property, after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union and reintroduced capitalism.

As the Western powers and the Kiev regime are using the cover of the “round table talks” to prepare even more aggressive measures, Moscow is looking for a deal with the imperialist powers and the Kiev regime.

“If there is somebody who emerges as a figure with the support of the majority of Ukrainians, of course it’s easier to have such an interlocutor than self-appointed people,” Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov declared. Warning that Ukraine was “as close to civil war as you can get,” he indicated that Russia will back the planned elections and embraced the Western-backed presidential candidate and billionaire oligarch Petro Poroshenko, stating: “We can do business with anyone.”

Moscow’s desperate attempts to cut a deal notwithstanding, military tensions are continuing to escalate between the world’s major powers. A Russian Pacific Fleet squadron sailed from Vladivostok on Wednesday, bound for Shanghai to meet a flotilla of six Chinese warships for the third joint Russia-China exercises in the South China Sea—which has become the focus of a tense standoff between the United States and China.



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